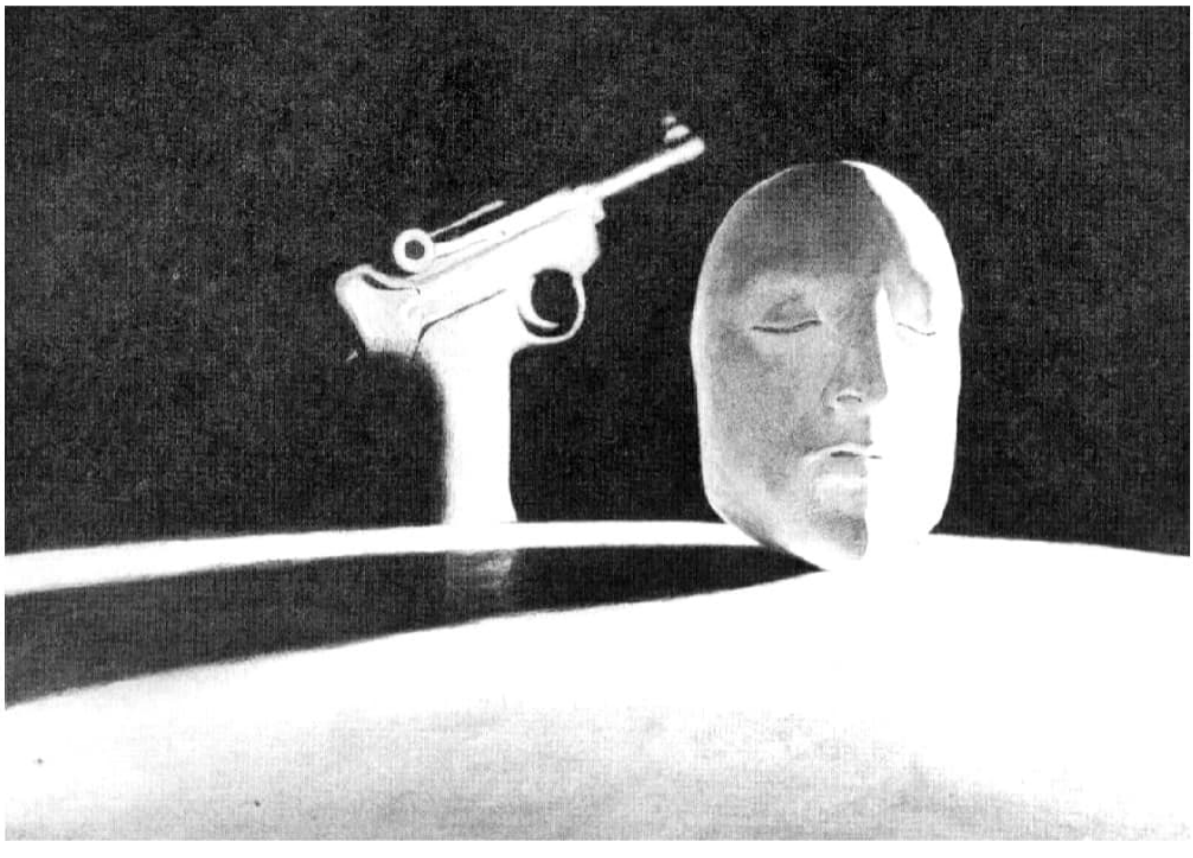
The mithology of an abanoned city

(di Jon Jay Muth)



1. The Sleepwalker
2. The voice
3. Fade to gray

Epic Illustrated (nn. 19..21/1983)
MARVEL COMICS

IN THE MIDST OF COLOSSAL AERIAL BUILDINGS A RAIN FALLS. IN THIS CITY YOU CAN CATCH IT IN YOUR HANDS. RAIN AS WARM AS TEARS. SILENCE REIGNS IN ITS WINDOWS. SPELLBOUND APPARITIONS.

HE SMILED QUIETLY.

PERHAPS YOU'VE SEEN THIS CITY. AND NEVER SAY A WORD. IT'S THE CITY IN THE MIRROR. WHERE YOU SAW REFLECTION THERE WAS DUPLICITY. AND YES, YOU WERE RIGHT, IT IS COLD WHERE YOU CAN'T SEE.

HE CLOSED HIS EYES AND MOVED HIS LIPS.

GHOSTS AND WHITE HORSES DANCE IN SLOW CIRCLES THROUGH THE ABANDONED SQUARES, HYPNOTIZING THE NIGHT. A WIND, MADE BY A THOUSAND UNSEEN CREATURES FLYING, RUFFLES YOUR HAIR LIKE AN ANGRY HAND.

HE COULD SEE HIS BREATH IN THE AIR.

THE COOLNESS OF STONE. DEAD AND GOLD PILLARS LISTEN. LAUGHTER ECHOING IN THE HAUNTED FILIGREE. DIAPHANOUS STAIRWAYS LEADING NOWHERE. CURTAINS OF SLOW MOTION LACE AND NIGHTMARES WAVE TO YOU FROM THE WINDOWS.

"THIS IS WHERE SHE IS NOW" HE LAUGHED.

M U T H

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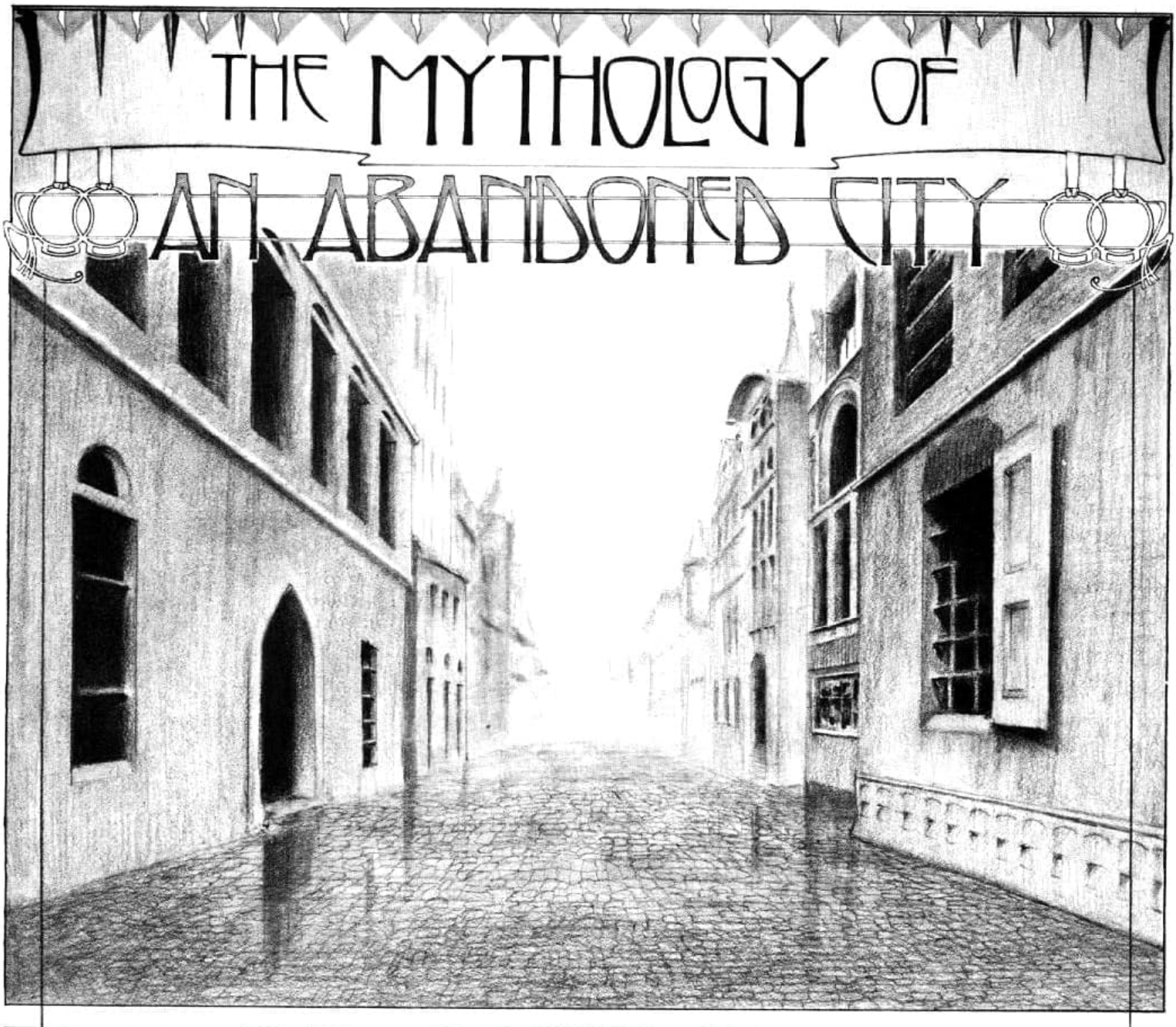
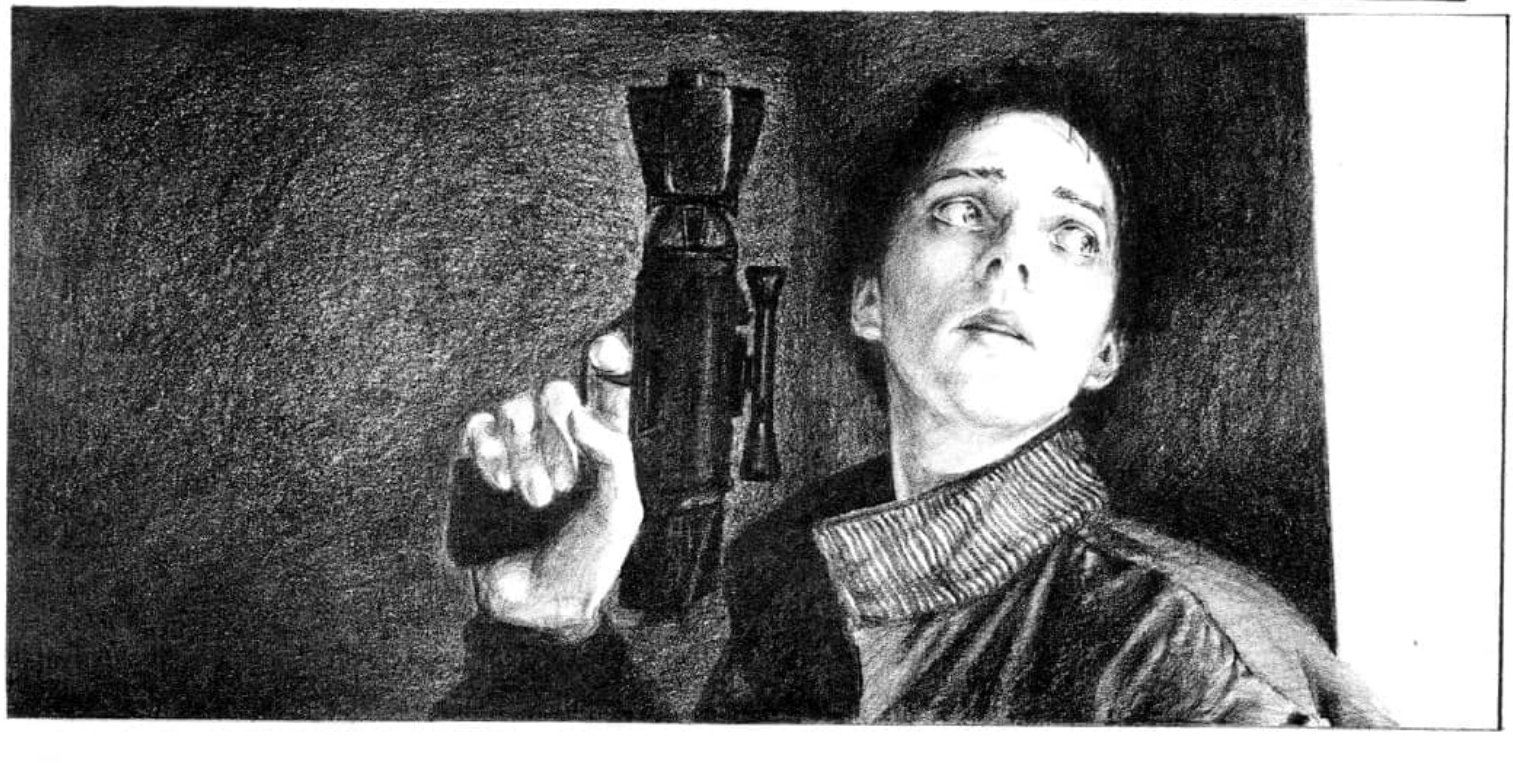
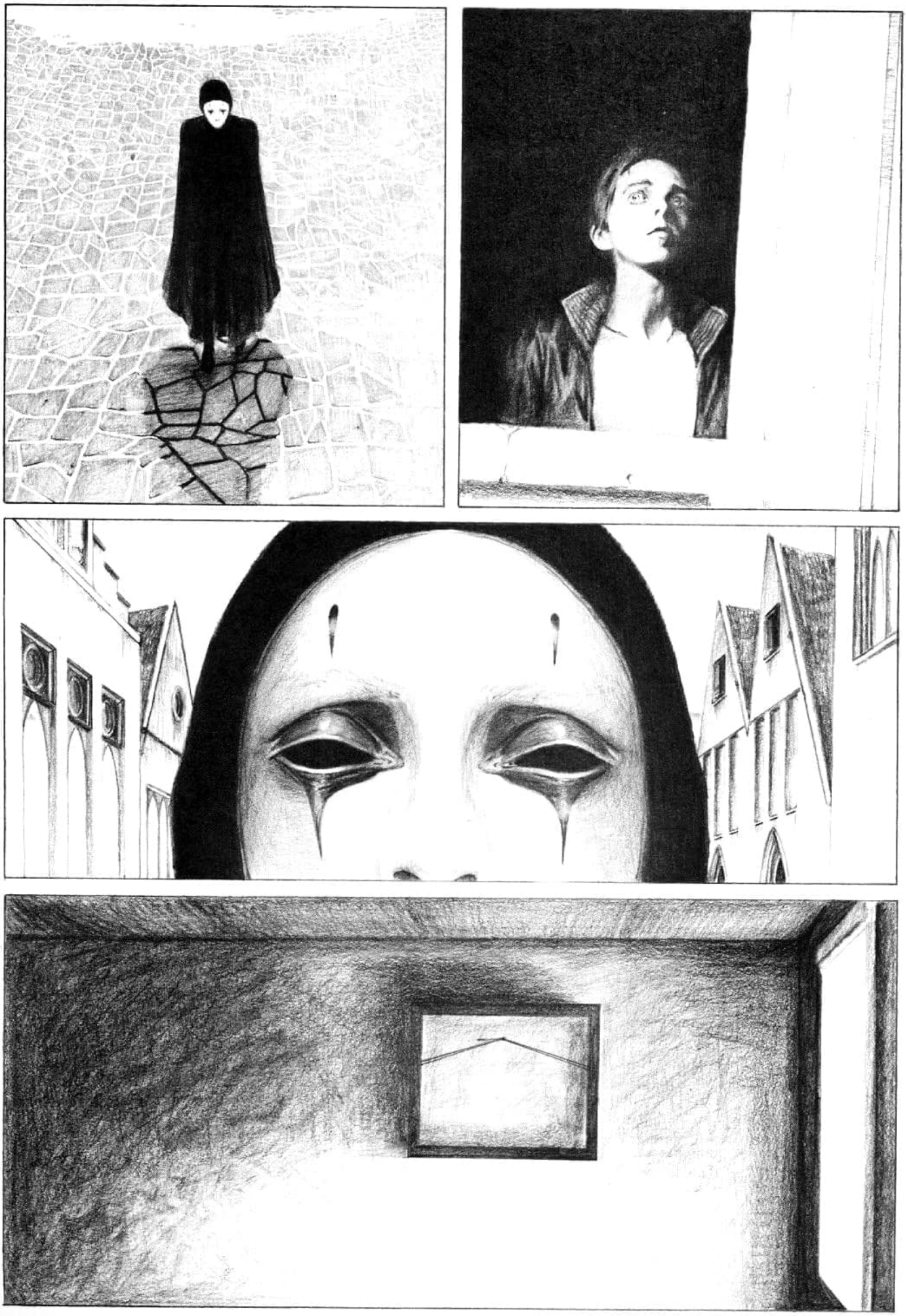
THE MYTHOLOGY OF AN ABANDONED CITY

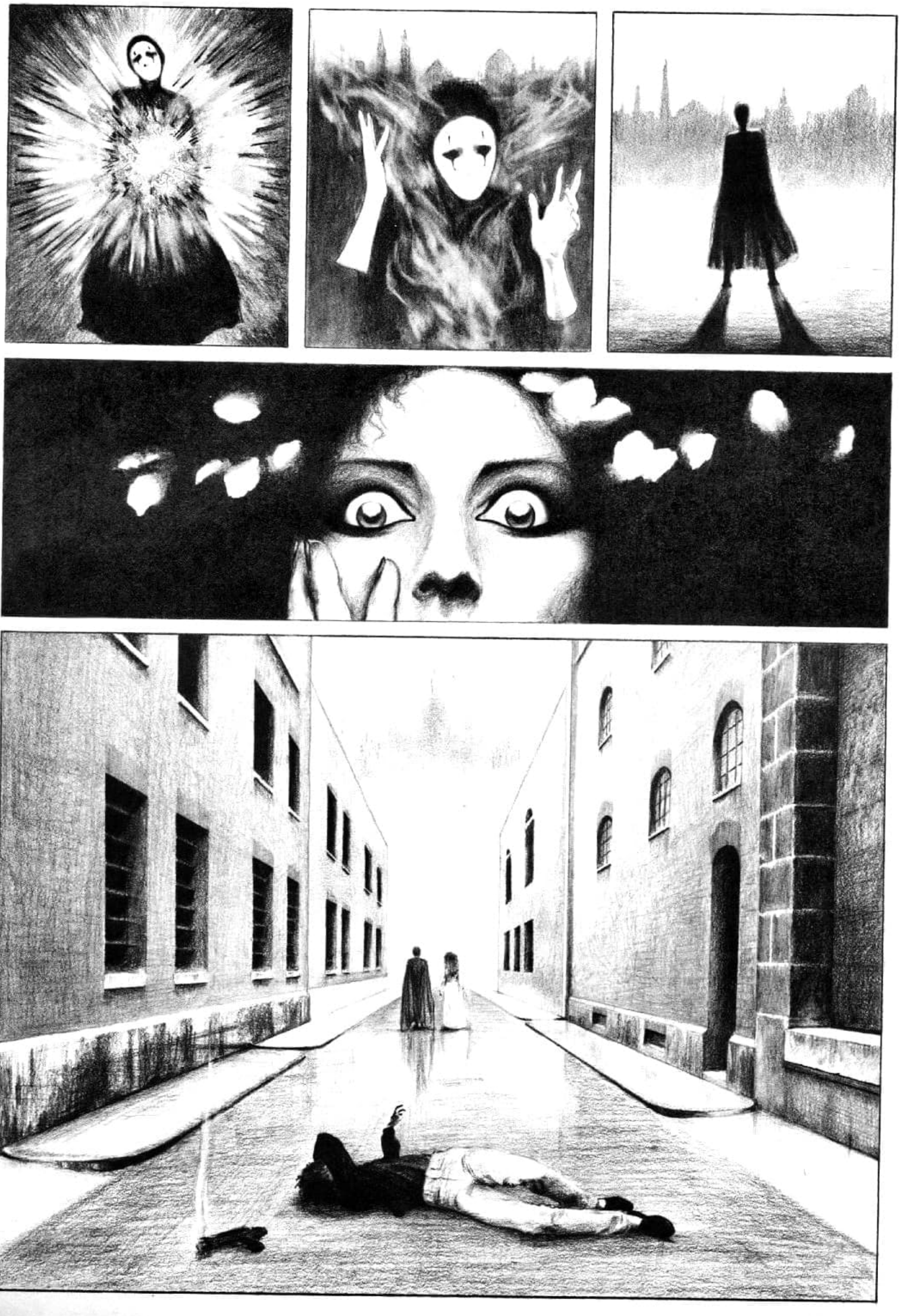


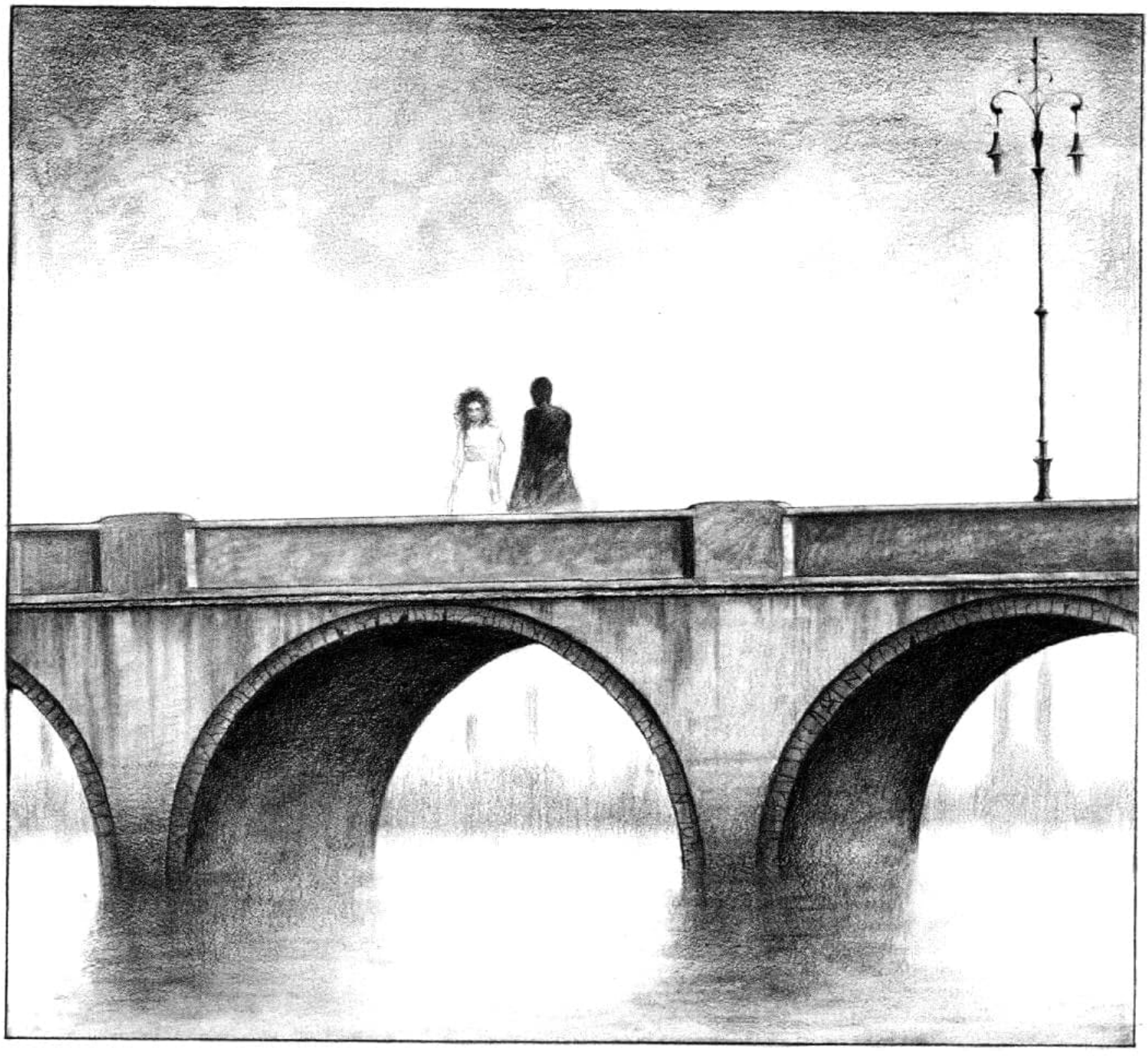
THE SLEEPWALKER



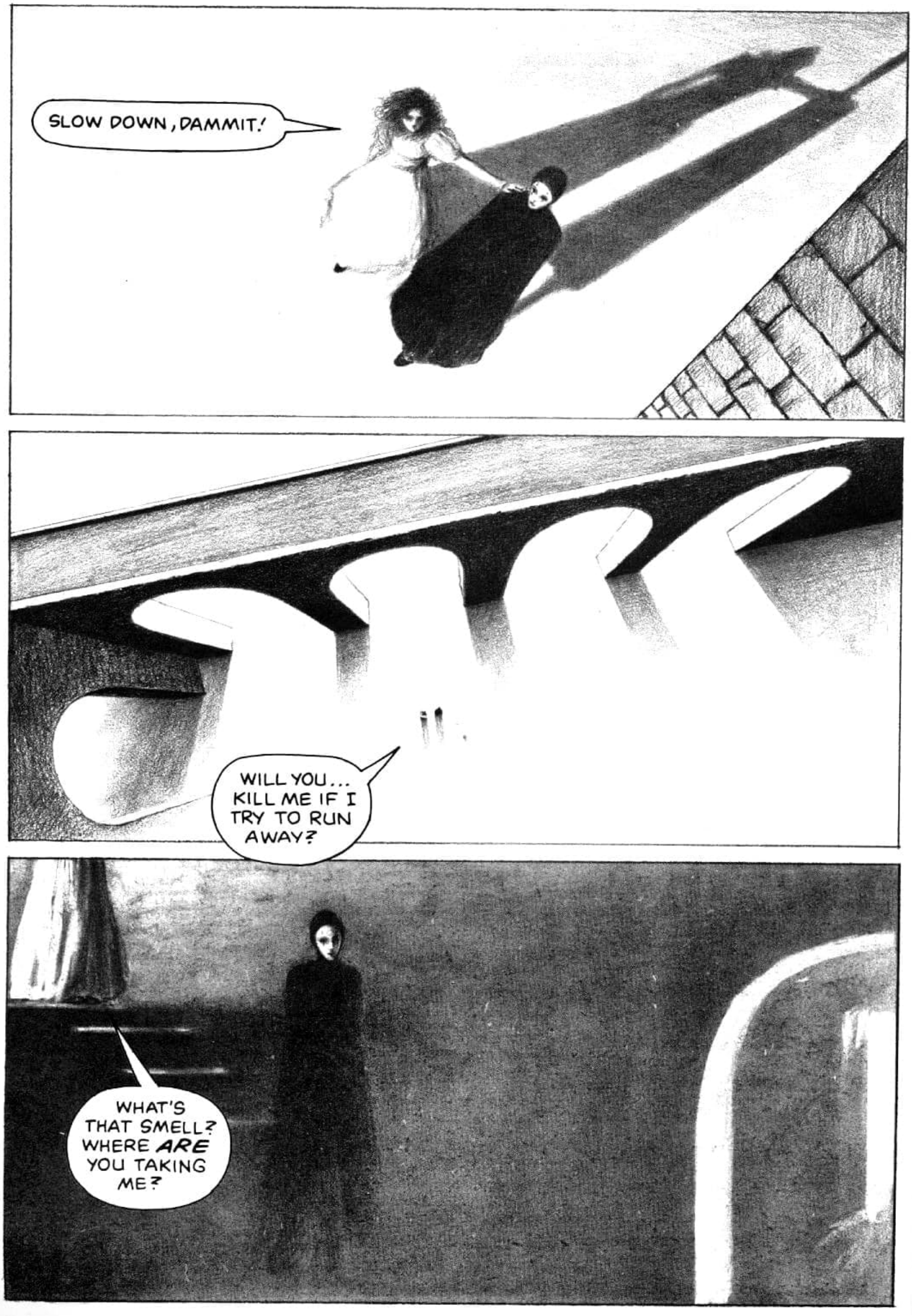


KRAK

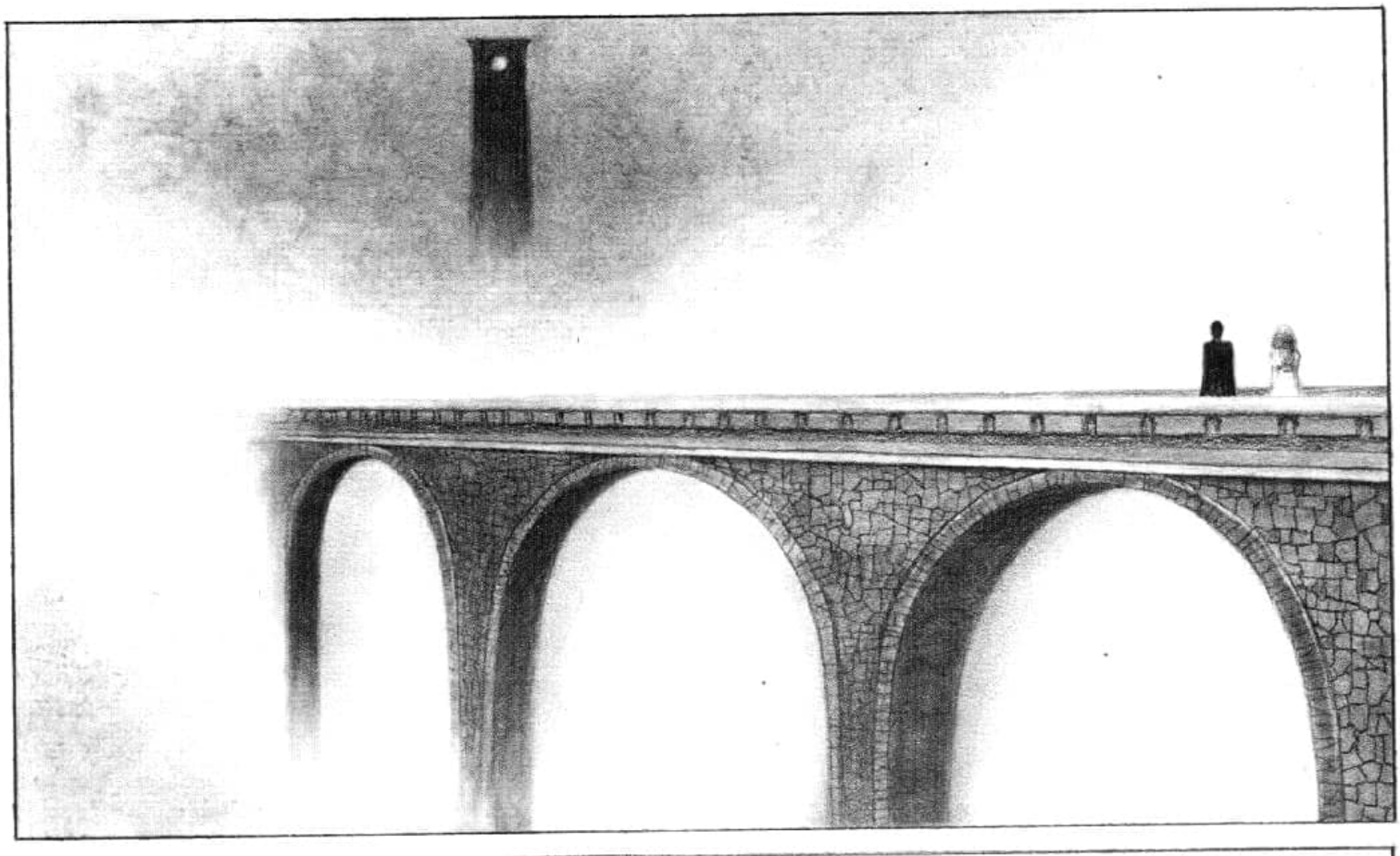




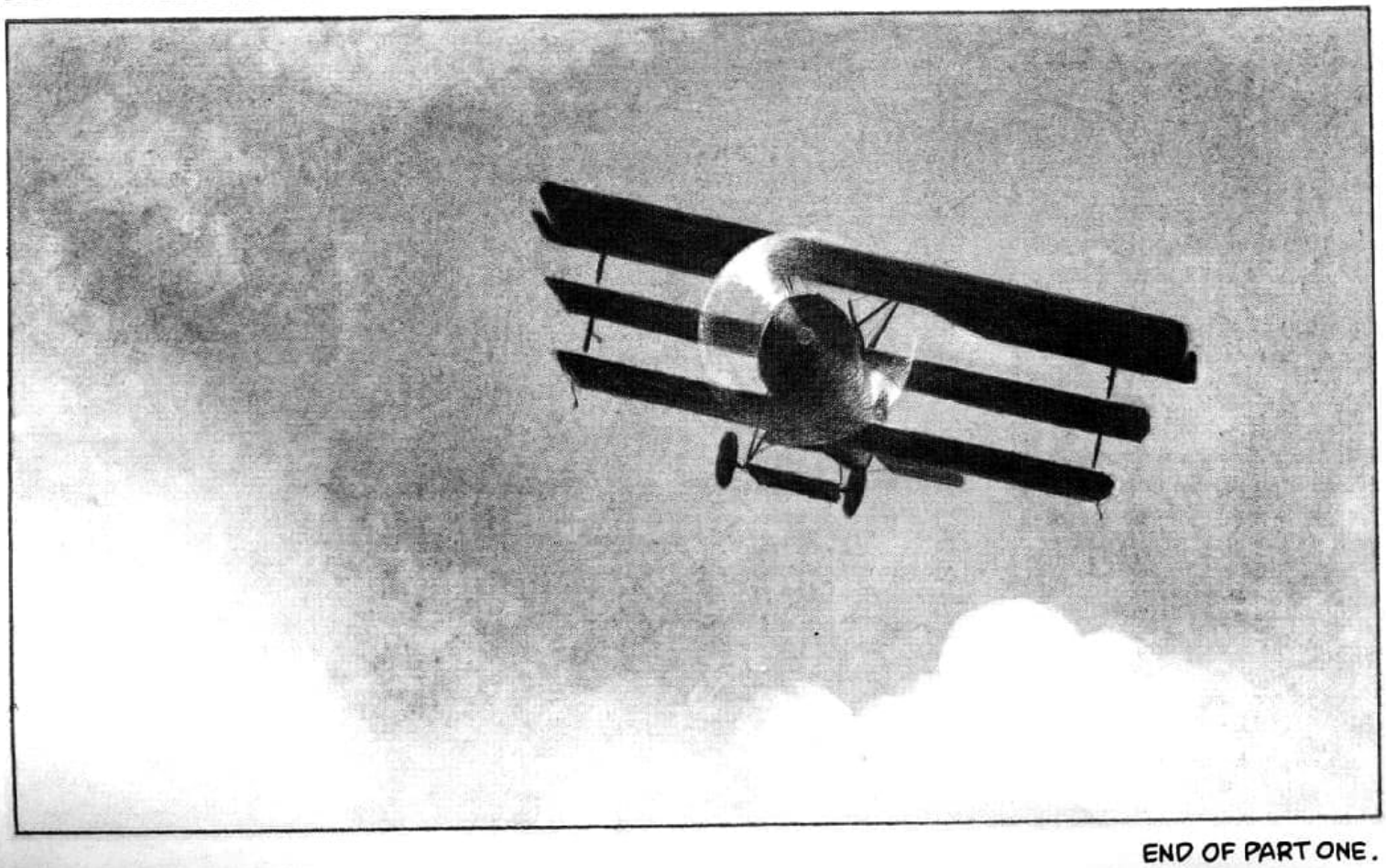
THAT BOY BACK THERE, HE KNEW YOU, DIDN'T HE? I COULD TELL. WHO ARE YOU?


SLOW DOWN, DAMMIT!
WILL YOU... KILL ME IF I TRY TO RUN AWAY?
WHAT'S THAT SMELL? WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

OH, MY GOD...



AND, PERHAPS SURPRISINGLY, THE GENTLEMAN WITH A SOMEWHAT VACANT STARE TURNS TO HIS RELUCTANT COMPANION, ABSENTLY ASKING IF SHE ENJOYS PARTIES.
IF SHE HEARS, HE CAN'T TELL. HIS VOICE, SHE THINKS, IS LIKE AN ECHO WITHOUT SOUND FIRST.
HER FINGERS SHIVER AS SHE HEARS A SOUL CREEP OUT OF THE TOWER SCREAMING,
'COME HERE...
COME HERE, LITTLE ONE.'



END OF PART ONE.

SHHH. THE PAIN IN YOUR EYES MAKES ME CRUEL.

P A R T · T W O

A WRAITH.SHE WAS, LED FORWARD BY A DARKLING MAN. HIS MOST GRADUAL GESTURE ENTANGLED WITH SADNESS.

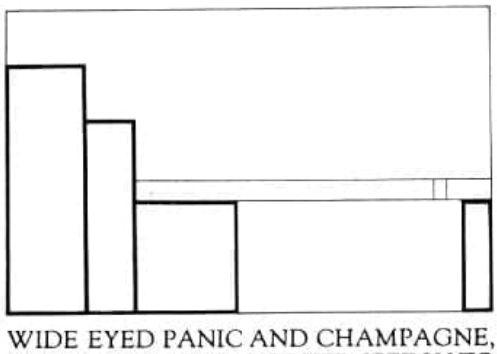
THE MYTHOLOGY OF

DAY DISSOLVES AND PLUNGES IN-

AN ABANDONED CITY

WARD AND HURLS DOWNWARD THOUSANDS OF ENORMOUS DREAMS. SHE WASN'T AWAKE AT ALL.

SHE WAS TAKEN TO THE PARTY. A GATHERING OF DREAMING WOMEN. COOL FACES. HAUNTED, DYING SILENT MINDS.



WIDE EYED PANIC AND CHAMPAGNE, BLIND HER AND CAUSE HER SPEECH TO SLUR. TENSION AND SAD REMEMBERING MAKE HER LISTEN, KEEP HER FROM HEARING THE QUIET MAN.

"SUPPOSE I DREAMED THIS" SAID THE VOICE.

NOTHING CAN SAVE YOU NOW.

THE VOICE

AND

THE QUIET MAN.

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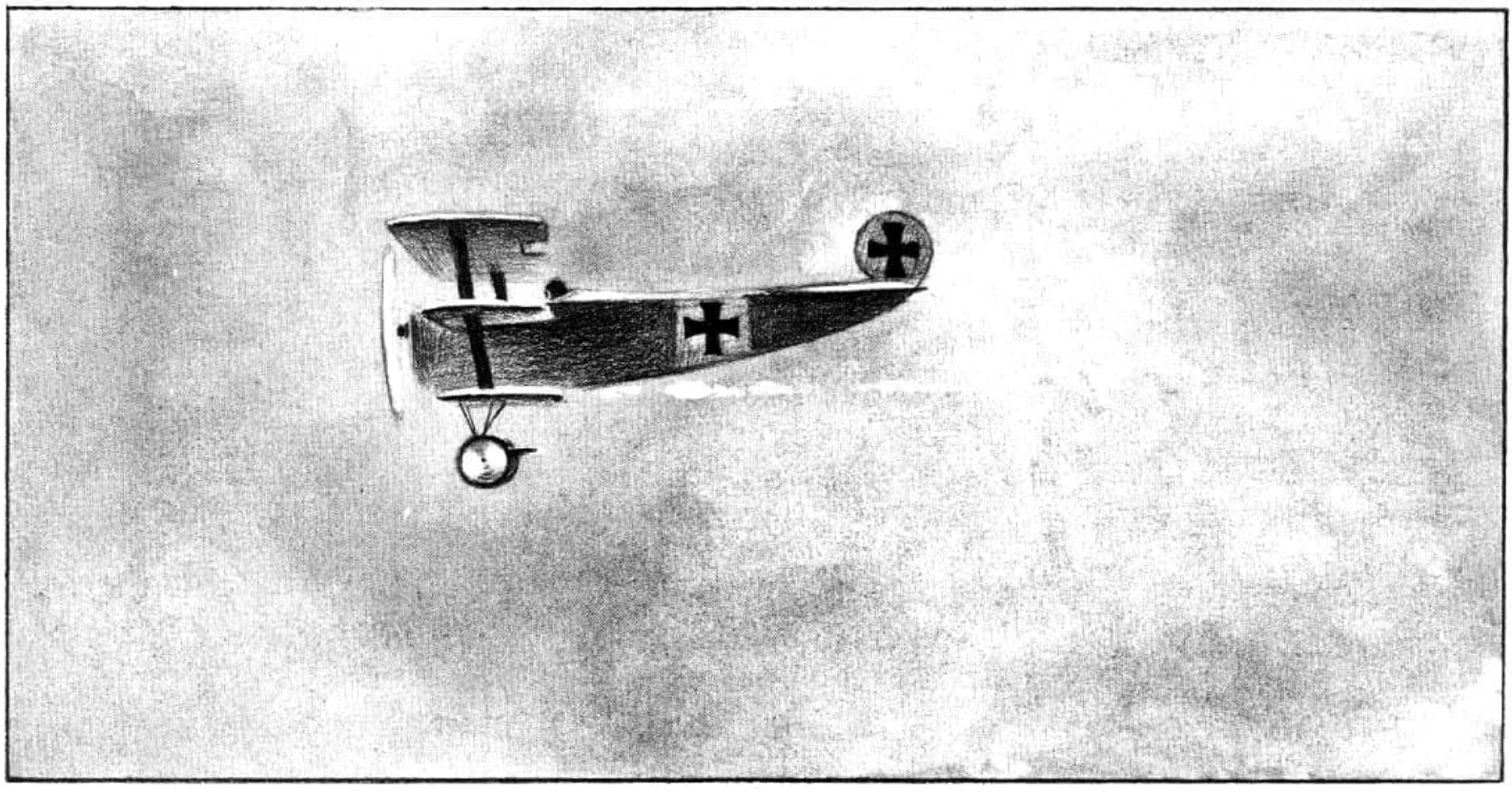
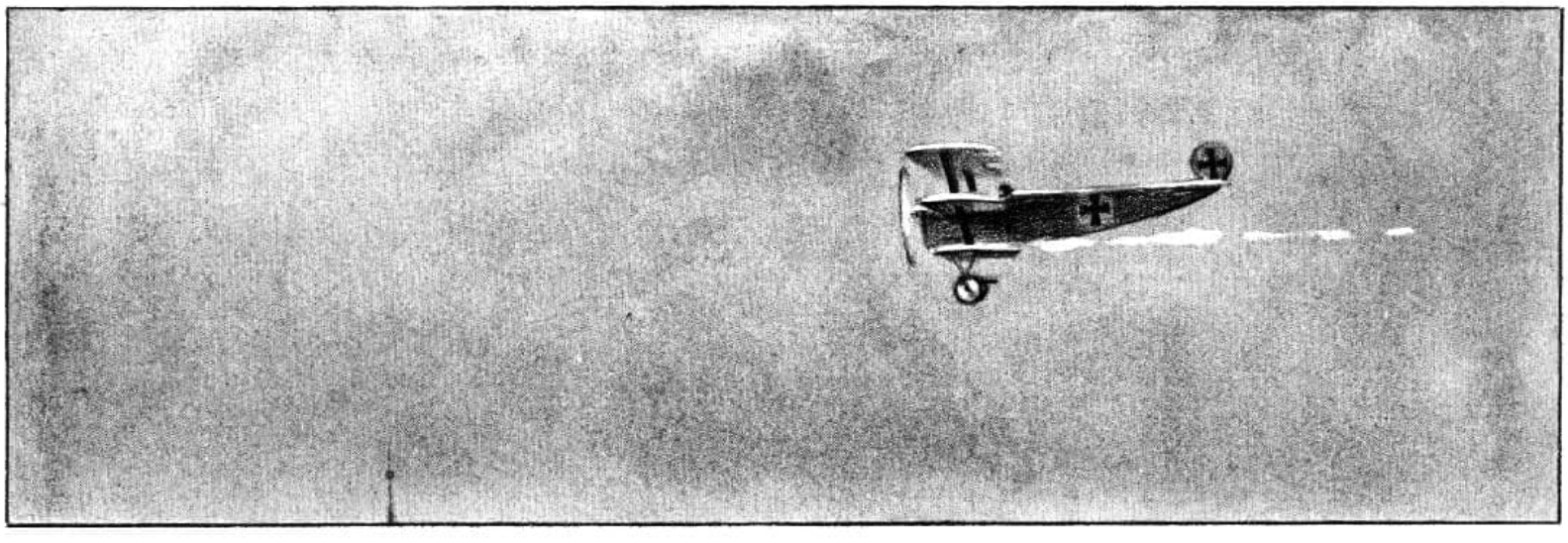
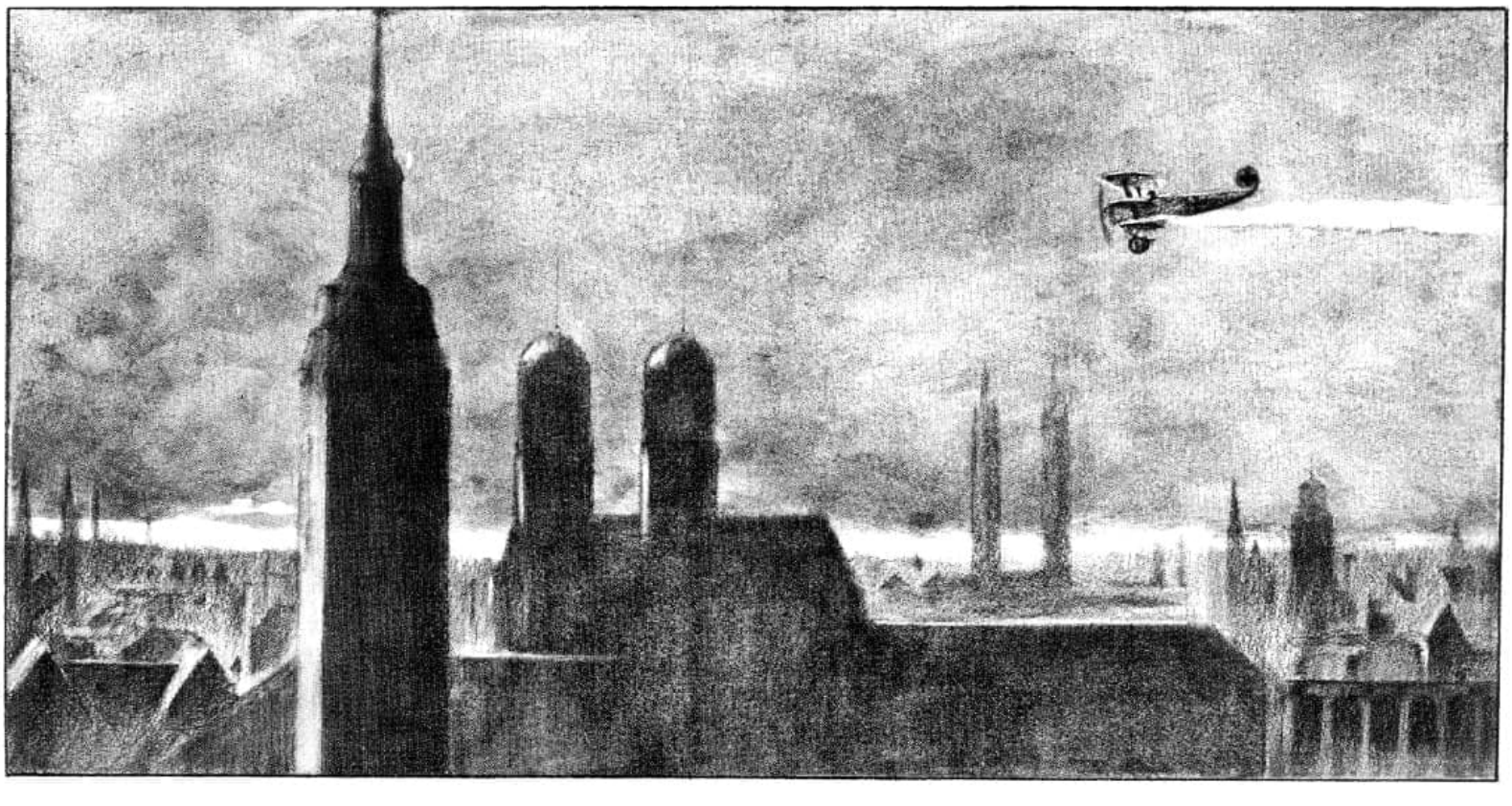




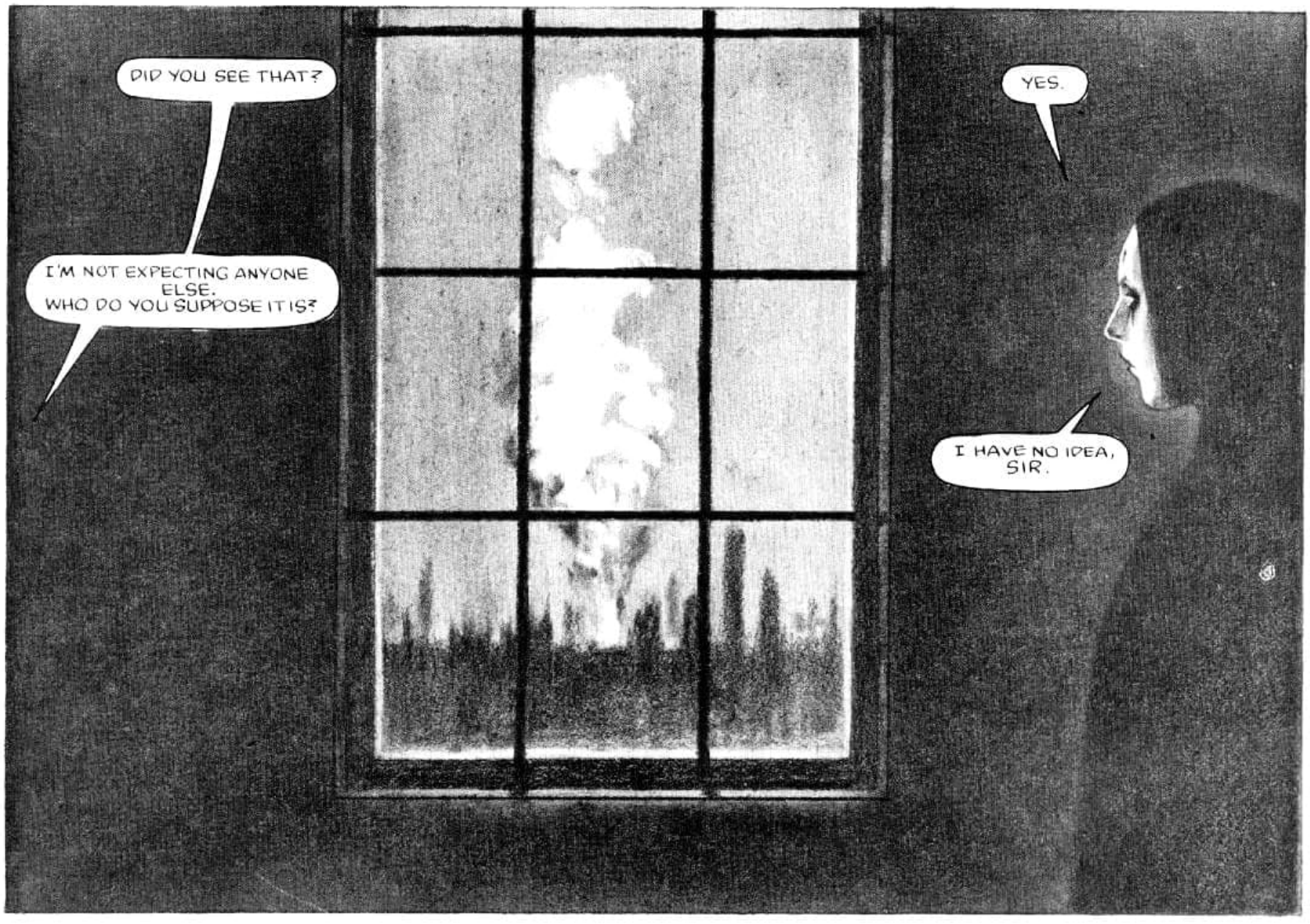


WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

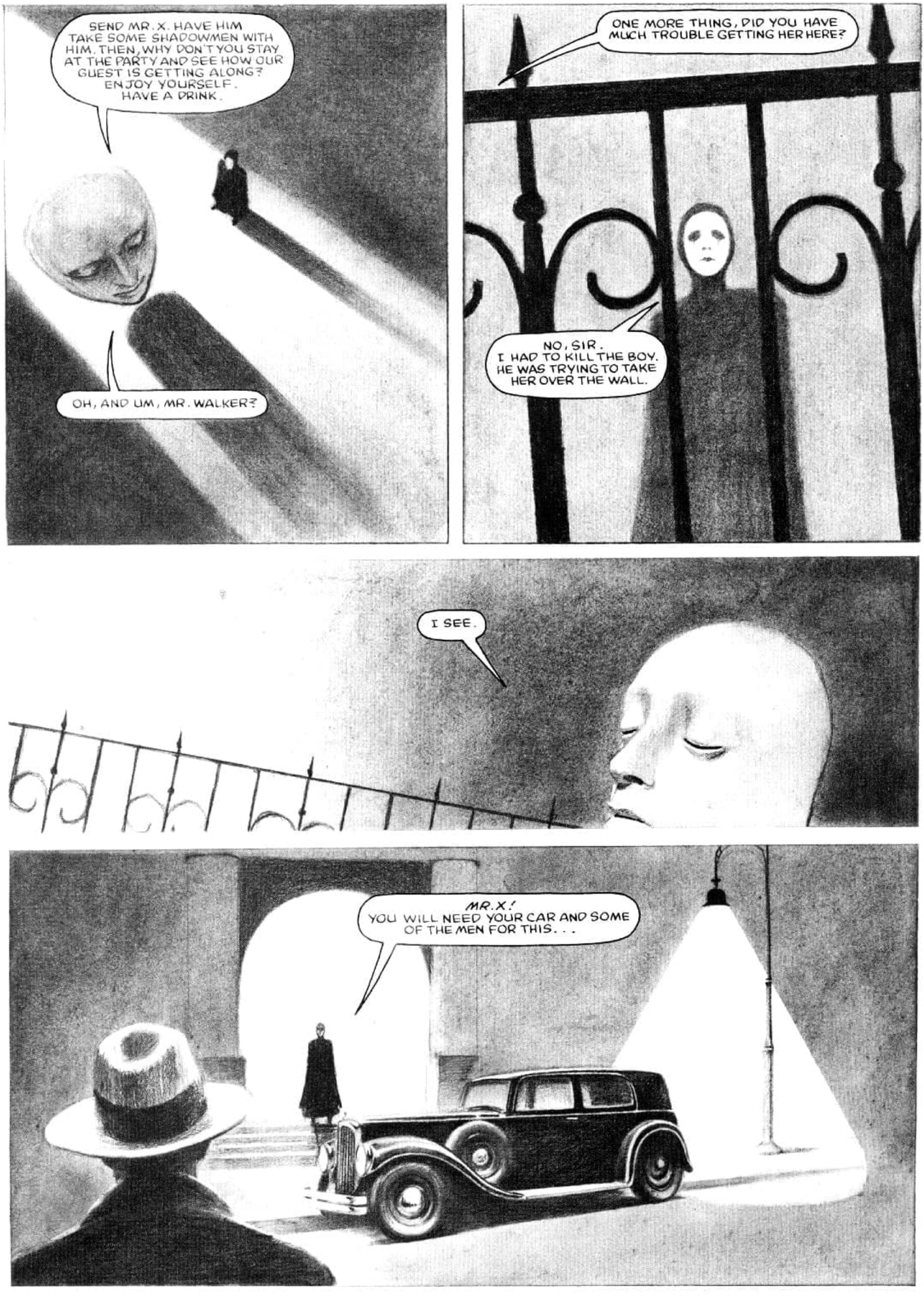
ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW...
WILL BE YOURS.
SOON.
I AM CALLED TO THE UPPER HALL. AND SO I WILL LEAVE YOU HERE.
ANYTHING YOU WANT, INDEED ANYTHING AT ALL...

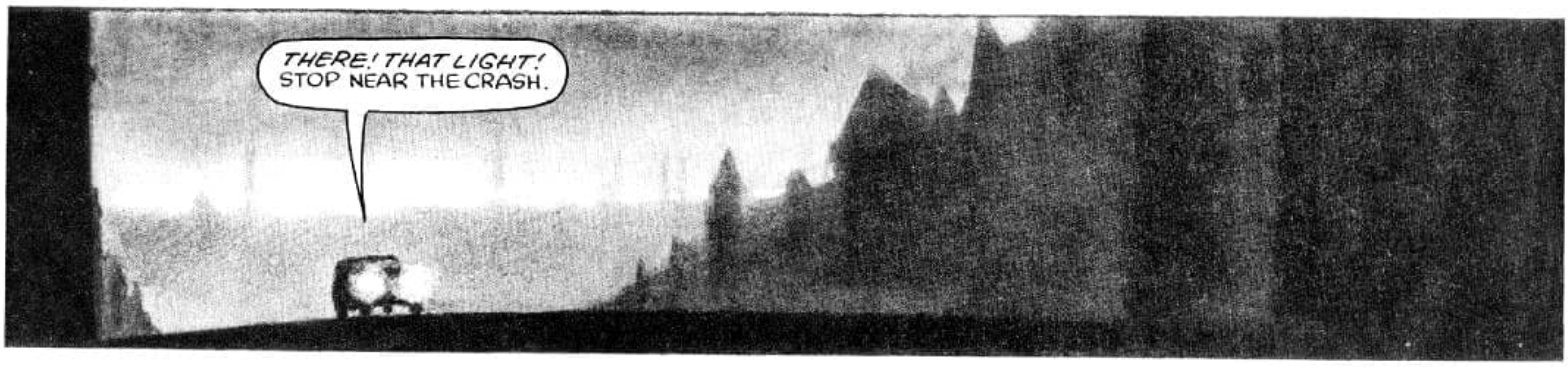
PERHAPS *THEY* CAN HELP YOU FIND IT.

. . . WELL OF COURSE I HAVE. AND WITH THE RAZORS.
DO YOU THINK I SHOULD WEAR THE LACE-UP THING NEXT TIME? YOU KNOW, THE ONE WITH THE GARTERS. . .
UM, COULD YOU PLEASE
. . . KEEPS THREATENING AND I JUST ACT LIKE I DON'T WANT TO. HE LOVES IT.
DID YOU EVER NOTICE, LIKE, THE WAY HIS EYES KIND OF. . .
EXCUSE ME, I JUST. .
. . . HAD TO UNTIE HIM AFTER THAT, BUT SHE SAID HE WAS FINISHED.
PARDON ME BUT IS THIS. . .
HE WAS TELLING ME ABOUT THE SLEEPWALKER. HE SAID NOT ONLY ARE HIS HANDS LIKE THAT, BUT SO IS HIS. . .
REALLY?

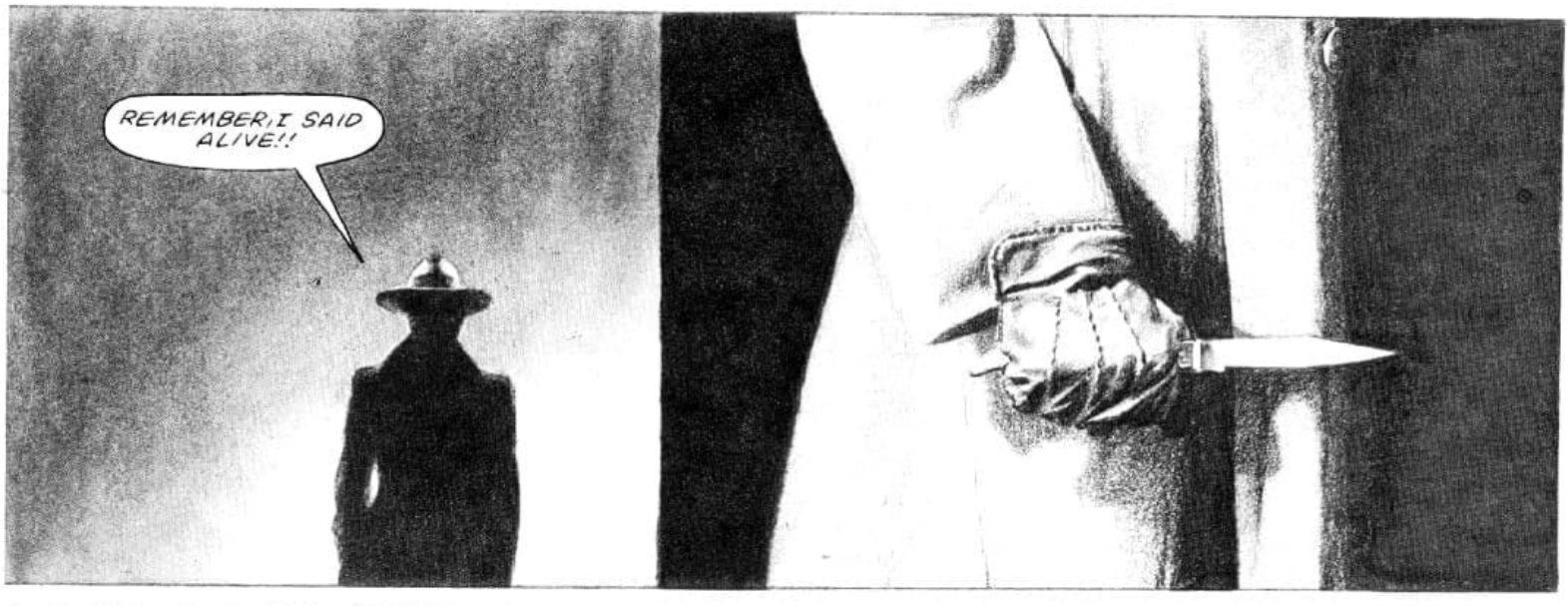

DID YOU SEE THAT?
I'M NOT EXPECTING ANYONE ELSE. WHO DO YOU SUPPOSE IT IS?
YES.
I HAVE NO IDEA, SIR.

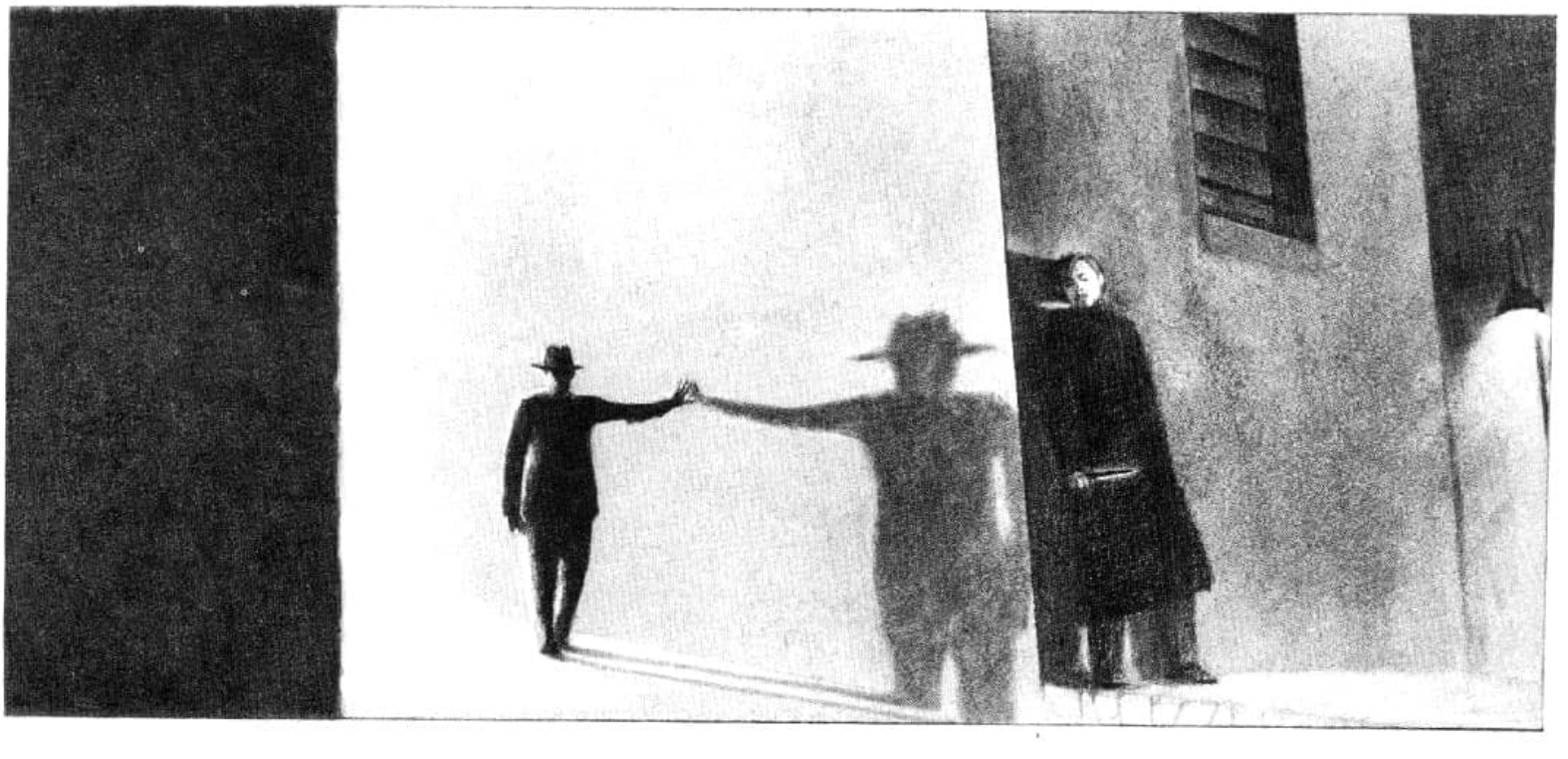
WELL, MR. WALKER, I DO BELIEVE SOMETHING IS AFOOT. WOULD YOU BE SO GOOD AS TO GO AND SEE IF YOU CAN FIND THE ONE FLYING THAT PLANE? *BRING HIM TO ME!*
RIGHT AWAY, SIR.


SEND MR. X. HAVE HIM TAKE SOME SHADOWMEN WITH HIM. THEN, WHY DON'T YOU STAY AT THE PARTY AND SEE HOW OUR GUEST IS GETTING ALONG? ENJOY YOURSELF. HAVE A DRINK.
OH, AND UM, MR. WALKER?
ONE MORE THING, DID YOU HAVE MUCH TROUBLE GETTING HER HERE?
NO, SIR. I HAD TO KILL THE BOY. HE WAS TRYING TO TAKE HER OVER THE WALL.
I SEE.
MR. X! YOU WILL NEED YOUR CAR AND SOME OF THE MEN FOR THIS...

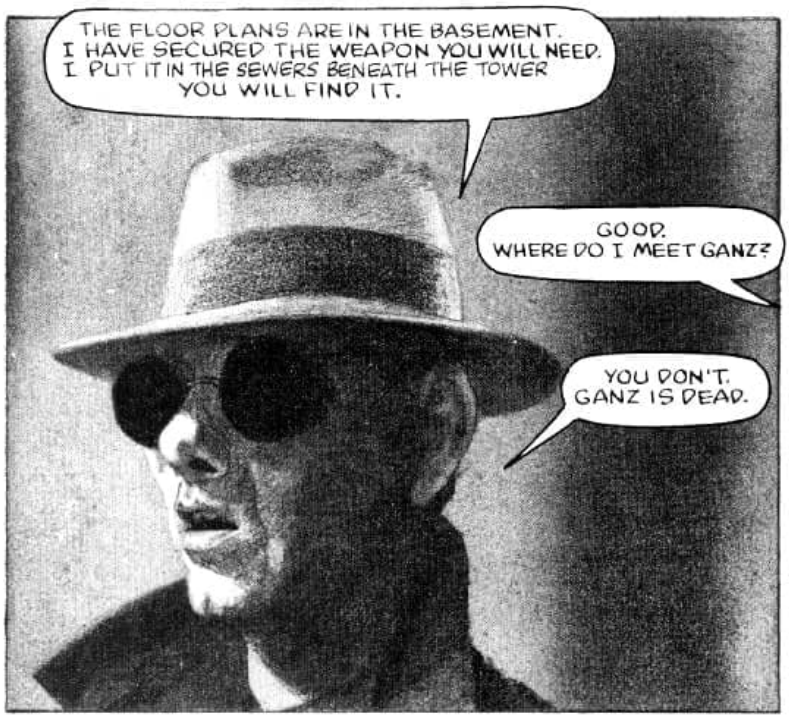

THERE! THAT LIGHT! STOP NEAR THE CRASH.

THERE ARE NO BODIES, SIR.
TAKE THE MEN AND COVER THE EAST SECTION. FIND WHO CAME DOWN AND BRING THEM TO ME. ALIVE. I'LL TAKE THIS AREA.


REMEMBER, I SAID ALIVE!!



'BECAUSE HE COULDN'T SEE HIMSELF.' 'SCHIELE? IS IT YOU? THANK GOD YOU MADE IT!
DON'T MOVE! DON'T EVEN BREATHE OR I WILL KILL YOU.' ANSWER QUICKLY,' WHY DID THE PEACOCK SCREAM?'
BE STILL! WHO ARE YOU?
I AM X. GOD, I THOUGHT THEY WOULD NEVER SEND YOU. MAY I TURN AROUND NOW, SIR?
CERTAINLY NOT. WHAT IF THE REAL X HAS BEEN DISCOVERED...
...AND IS HELD CAPTIVE IN THE TOWER AND YOU ARE A SUBSTITUTE, WAITING TO GIVE A SIGNAL FOR YOUR FRIENDS OUT IN THE STREETS?!!
I ASSURE YOU, SIR, I...
WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS?
UH, I AM TO GIVE YOU THE KEYS THAT I HAVE TO THE TOWER. THEY ARE IN MY POCKET. DON'T WORRY! THE VOICE DOESN'T SUSPECT ANYTHING. I HAVE BEEN VERY CONVINCING!
WHAT ELSE?

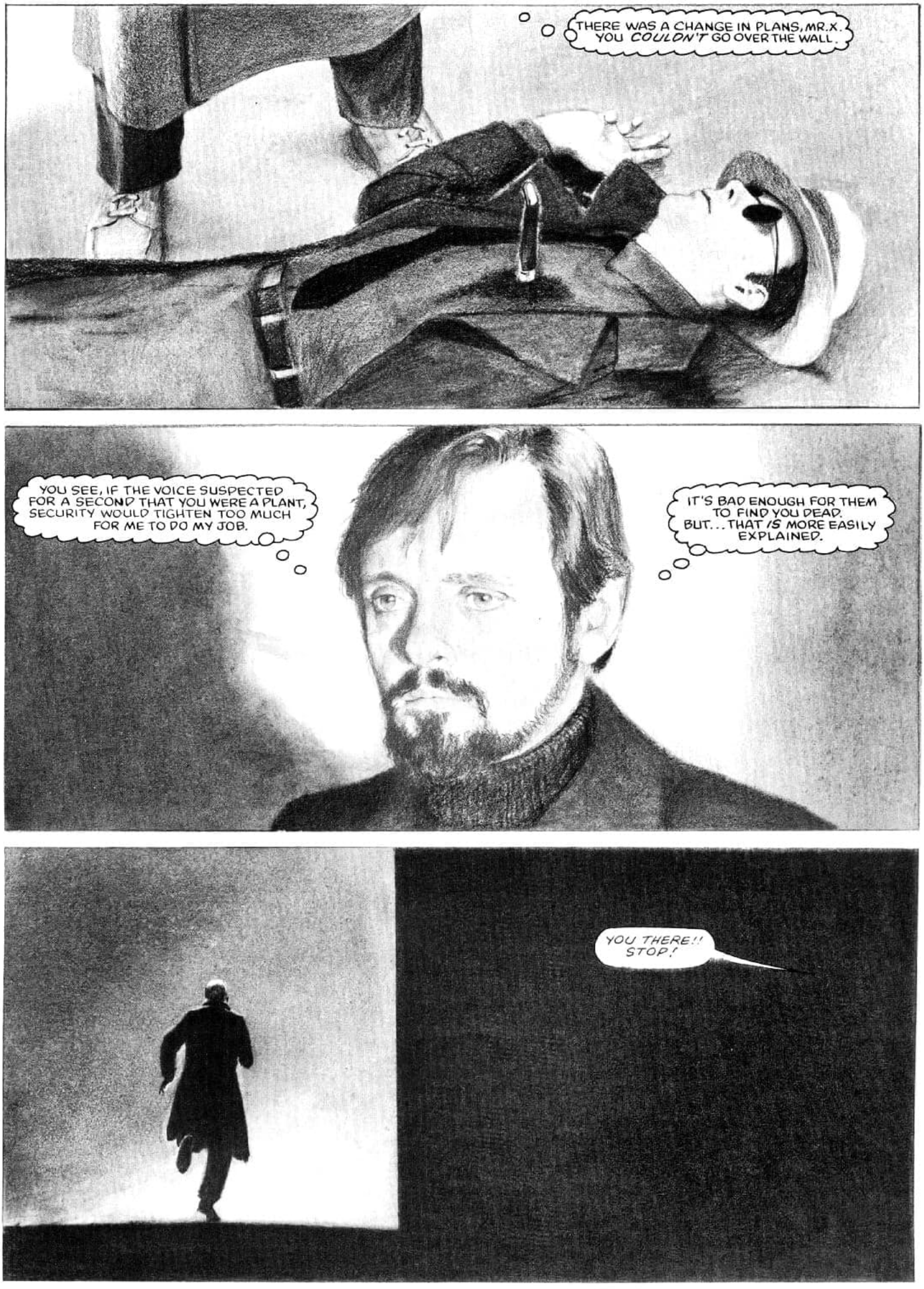

THE FLOOR PLANS ARE IN THE BASEMENT. I HAVE SECURED THE WEAPON YOU WILL NEED. I PUT IT IN THE SEWERS BENEATH THE TOWER YOU WILL FIND IT.
GOOD. WHERE DO I MEET GANZ?
YOU DON'T. GANZ IS DEAD.

I HAD JUST HEARD ABOUT IT BEFORE THEY SENT THIS PATROL TO LOOK FOR YOU, SO I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED EXACTLY. THE VOICE SENT THE SLEEPWALKER OUT. I ASSUME THAT THE SLEEPWALKER KILLED HIM.

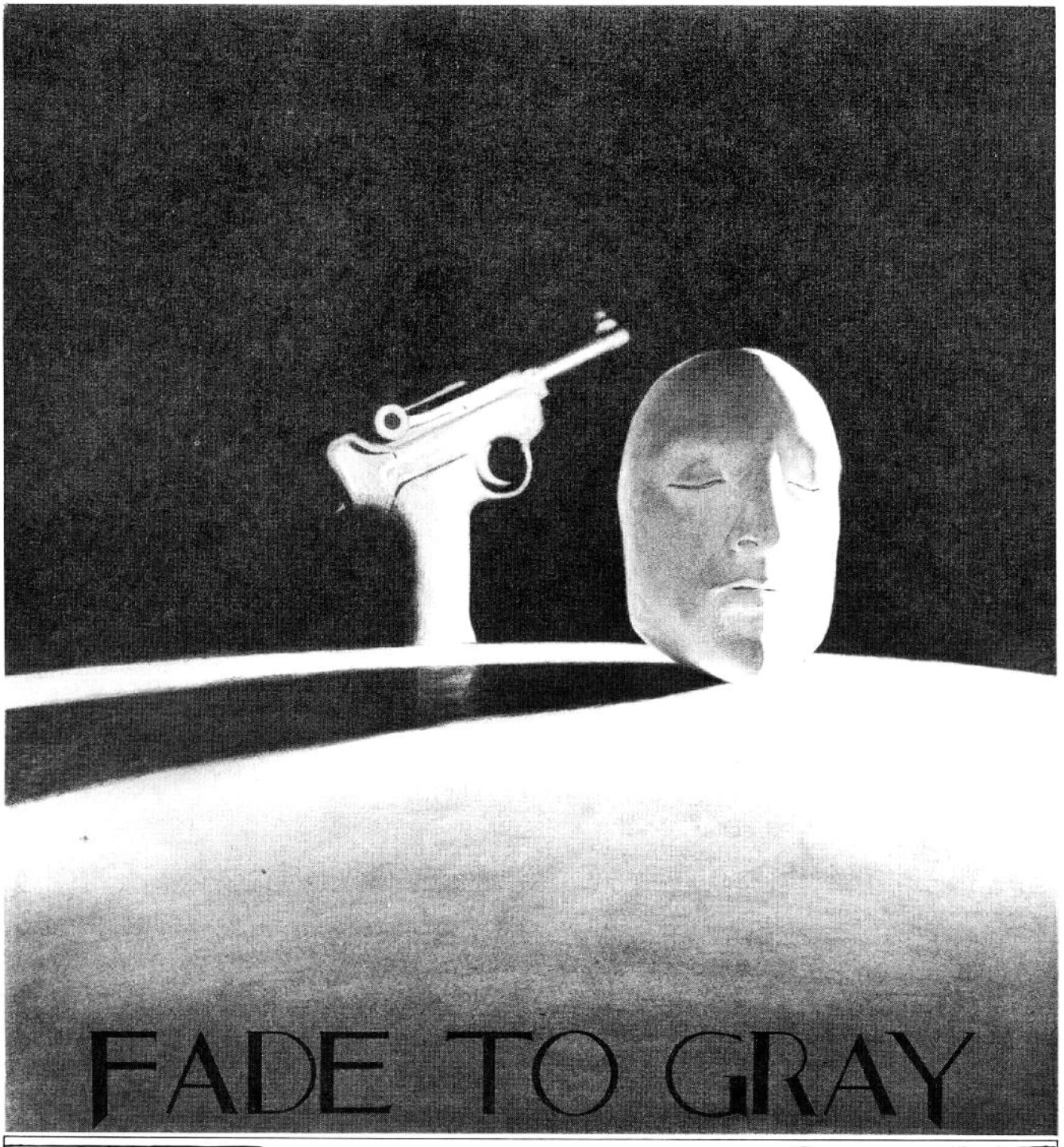
A REPORT CAME IN THAT A BOY WAS TRYING TO HELP A GIRL GET OVER THE WALL. I THINK THE BOY WAS GANZ.
SHIT!

WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS AFTER YOU HAVE SEEN ME?
I AM TO GO OVER THE WALL AT EAST SECTOR BOLT HOLE. POINT FIVE.
AND IF YOU ARE CAUGHT?
I WON'T BE CAUGHT. IT IS LESS THAN ONE KILOMETER. DON'T WORRY.

I WON'T.


THERE WAS A CHANGE IN PLANS, MR. X. YOU COULDN'T GO OVER THE WALL.
YOU SEE, IF THE VOICE SUSPECTED FOR A SECOND THAT YOU WERE A PLANT, SECURITY WOULD TIGHTEN TOO MUCH FOR ME TO DO MY JOB.
IT'S BAD ENOUGH FOR THEM TO FIND YOU DEAD. BUT... THAT IS MORE EASILY EXPLAINED.
YOU THERE!! STOP!

MYTHOLOGY OF AN ABANDONED CITY concludes next issue



FADE TO GRAY

PART THREE

THE MYTHOLOGY OF AN ABANDONED CITY

NOTHING IS WHAT IT SEEMS.
THIS IS NOT A CONCEPT, IT IS AN ENIGMA.

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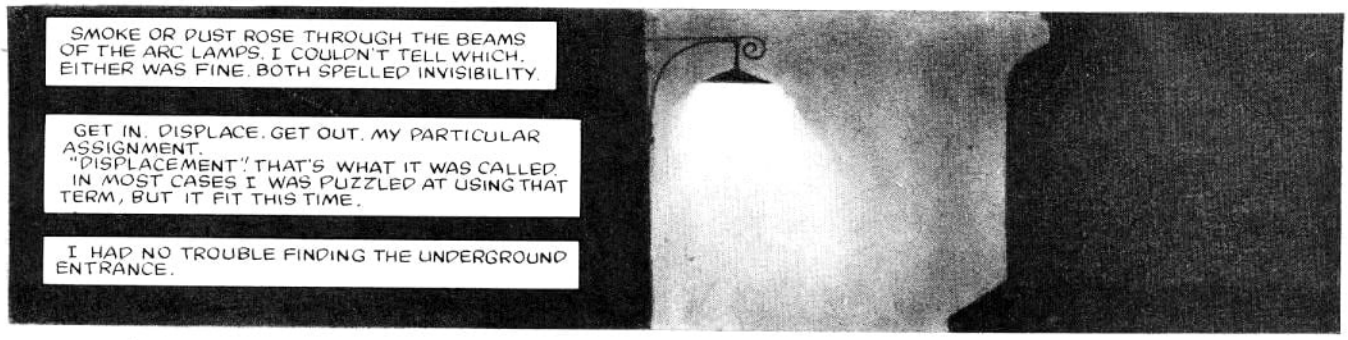
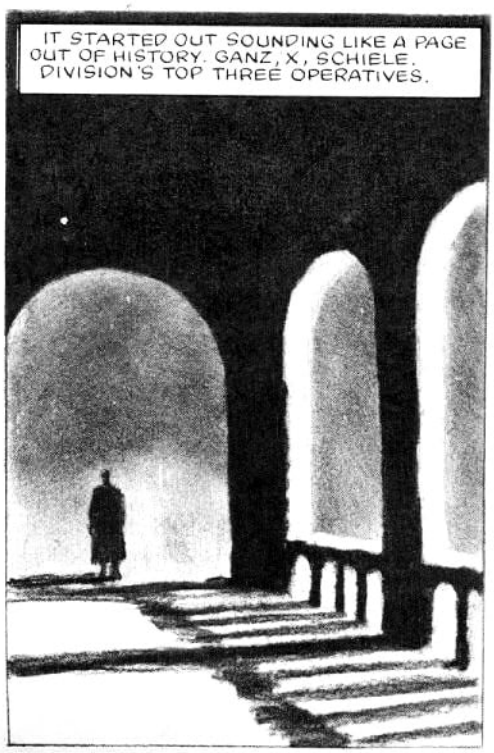
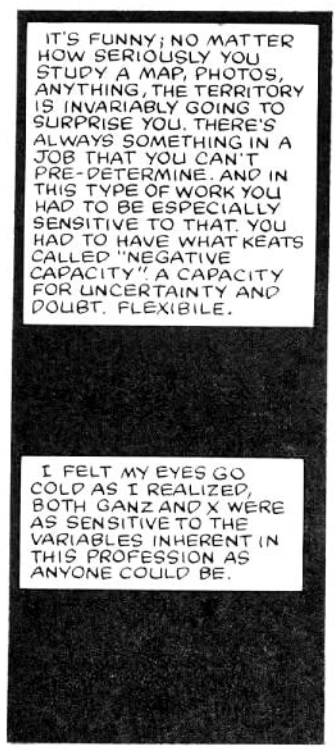
FINALLY THE SIRENS FADED OUT. I HAD LOST THEM.


SMOKE OR DUST ROSE THROUGH THE BEAMS OF THE ARC LAMPS. I COULDN'T TELL WHICH. EITHER WAS FINE. BOTH SPELLED INVISIBILITY.
GET IN. DISPLACE. GET OUT. MY PARTICULAR ASSIGNMENT. "DISPLACEMENT". THAT'S WHAT IT WAS CALLED. IN MOST CASES I WAS PUZZLED AT USING THAT TERM, BUT IT FIT THIS TIME.
I HAD NO TROUBLE FINDING THE UNDERGROUND ENTRANCE.


IT STARTED OUT SOUNDING LIKE A PAGE OUT OF HISTORY. GANZ, X, SCHIELE. DIVISION'S TOP THREE OPERATIVES.


IT'S FUNNY; NO MATTER HOW SERIOUSLY YOU STUDY A MAP, PHOTOS, ANYTHING, THE TERRITORY IS INVARIABLY GOING TO SURPRISE YOU. THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING IN A JOB THAT YOU CAN'T PRE-DETERMINE. AND IN THIS TYPE OF WORK YOU HAD TO BE ESPECIALLY SENSITIVE TO THAT. YOU HAD TO HAVE WHAT KEATS CALLED "NEGATIVE CAPACITY" A CAPACITY FOR UNCERTAINTY AND DOUBT. FLEXIBILE.
I FELT MY EYES GO COLD AS I REALIZED, BOTH GANZ AND X WERE AS SENSITIVE TO THE VARIABLES INHERENT IN THIS PROFESSION AS ANYONE COULD BE.

GANZ WAS ONE OF PERHAPS HALF A DOZEN WHO COULD LAY OSTENSIBLE CLAIM TO BEING SOMETHING OF A LEGEND. AT TWENTY FOUR HE WAS RANKED WITH THE TOP INTERNATIONAL LEVEL FIELD MEN. GANZ WAS A WONDERKID. YOU DON'T RUN INTO MANY OF THOSE IN THE BUSINESS. NOT THE REAL THING ANYWAY. MOSTLY THAT'S A MISNOMER. FOR SOME HOTSHOT, WHO THROUGH NO FAULT OF HIS OWN, ENDS UP THE LAST ONE ALIVE AT THE CLOSE OF THE OPERATION.

BUT I KNEW ABOUT GANZ. HE WAS SOLID. NEVER LET THE WORK RATE INCREASES INTERFERE. NEVER LET HIMSELF BECOME VULNERABLE. A GOOD KID... AND NEVER SAW TWENTY SIX.

X WAS A DIFFERENT STORY. HE WAS A RODENT.

SOME SAID HE HAD SIMPLY BEEN ON TOO MANY SIDES TOO OFTEN. CLIMBED OUT OF TOO MANY BURNING CARS THAT NO ONE ELSE SEEMED TO BE ABLE TO GET CLEAR OF. OTHERS SAID HE HAD NO SOUL. I THOUGHT THAT WAS PRETTY FUNNY. SOUL WAS NOT CRITERIA FOR THIS JOB. HE HAD THE SAME LEVEL CLEARANCE THAT GANZ AND I DID AND WHEN THE WORD CAME DOWN FROM DIVISION THAT X WAS TO BE REMOVED UPON MY ARRIVAL, I FELT REGRET. SINCERE. BUT HARDLY MORE THAN A DOLLOP'S WORTH.

HE WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME THING TO ME. ANY ADVANTAGE WAS WORTH WHATEVER THE COST. GANZ' DEATH WAS A LITTLE MORE DISHEARTENING. I DON'T KNOW WHY. NEITHER OF THEM HAD BEEN FRIENDS. NOT FRIENDS, NOR COHORTS, NOR ASSOCIATES. BARELY ACQUAINTANCES. WE SHARED AN OCCUPATION.

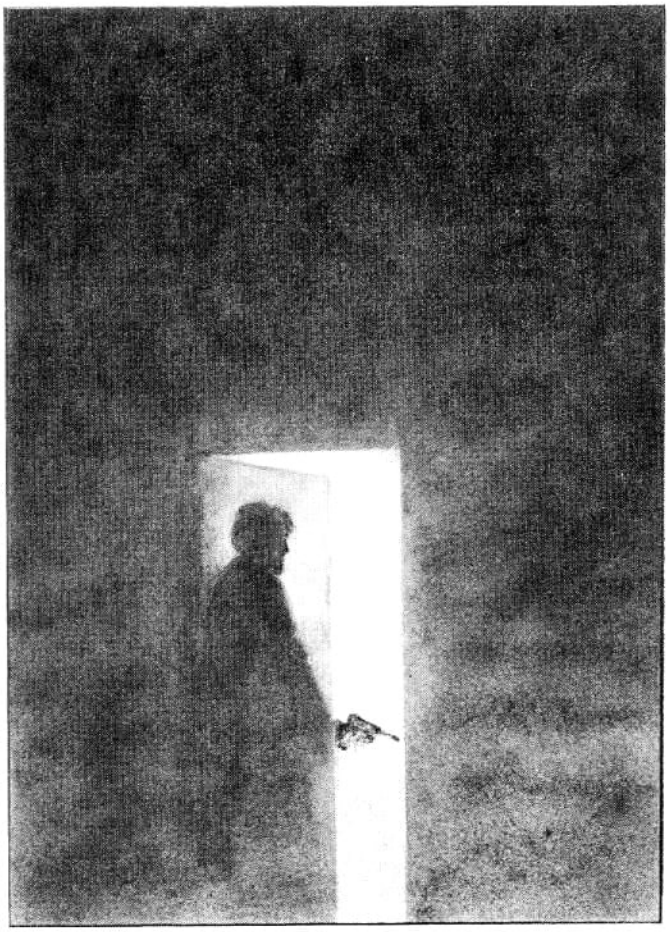
NOW THEY WERE BOTH DEAD. I GUESSED I WAS, TOO. SOMETHING ABOUT THIS WHOLE AFFAIR SMELLED BAD.

SUDDENLY I COULD FEEL THE WRONGNESS OF IT. AS IF THE MISTS I WAS SLIPPING THROUGH WERE SOMEHOW CHARGED WITH FEAR AND SLIPPING THROUGH ME.

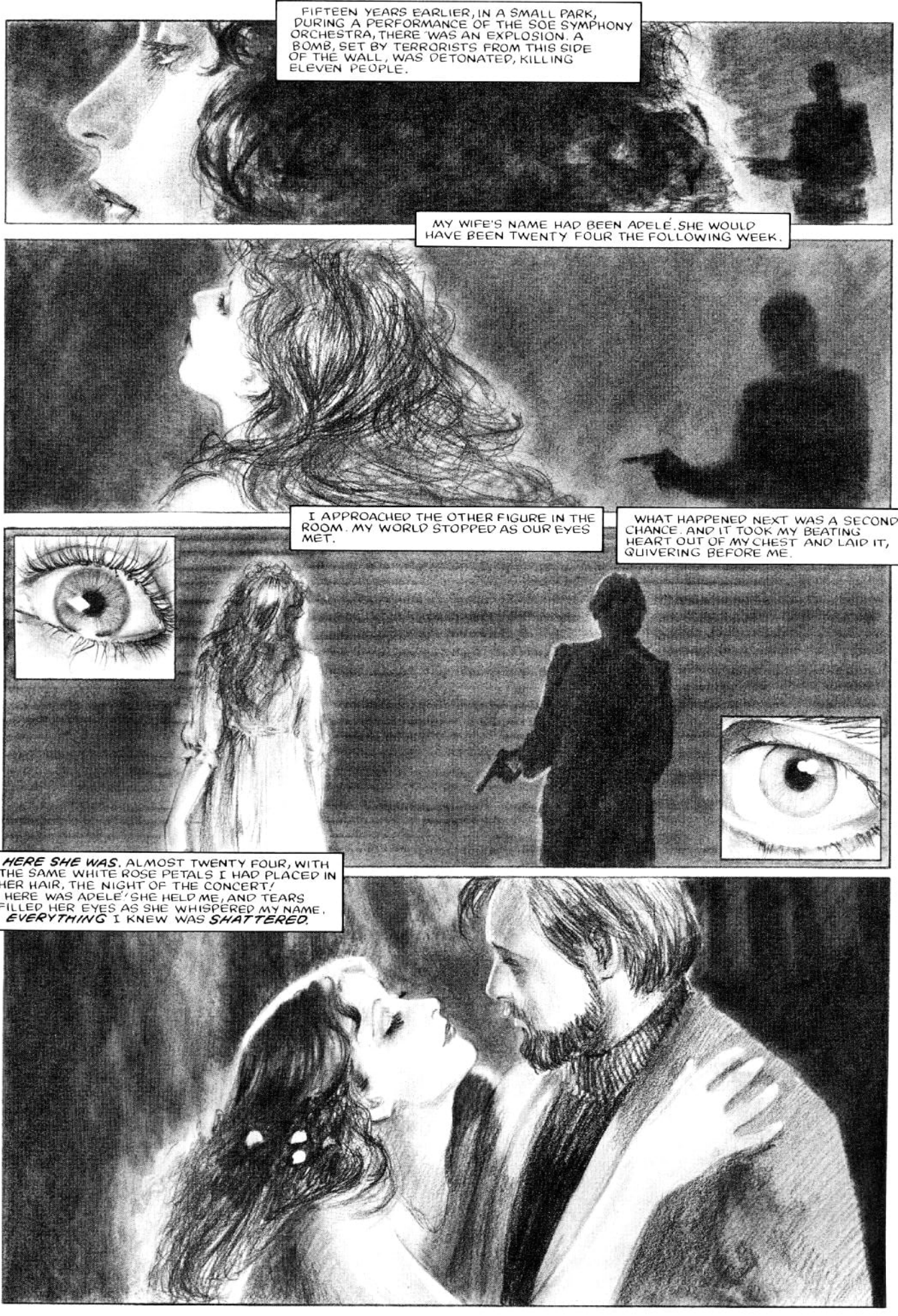
I COULD FEEL THE COLD DEAD EYES OF X AND GANZ ON ME AND I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, "I'M COMING, BOYS. I'M COMING."

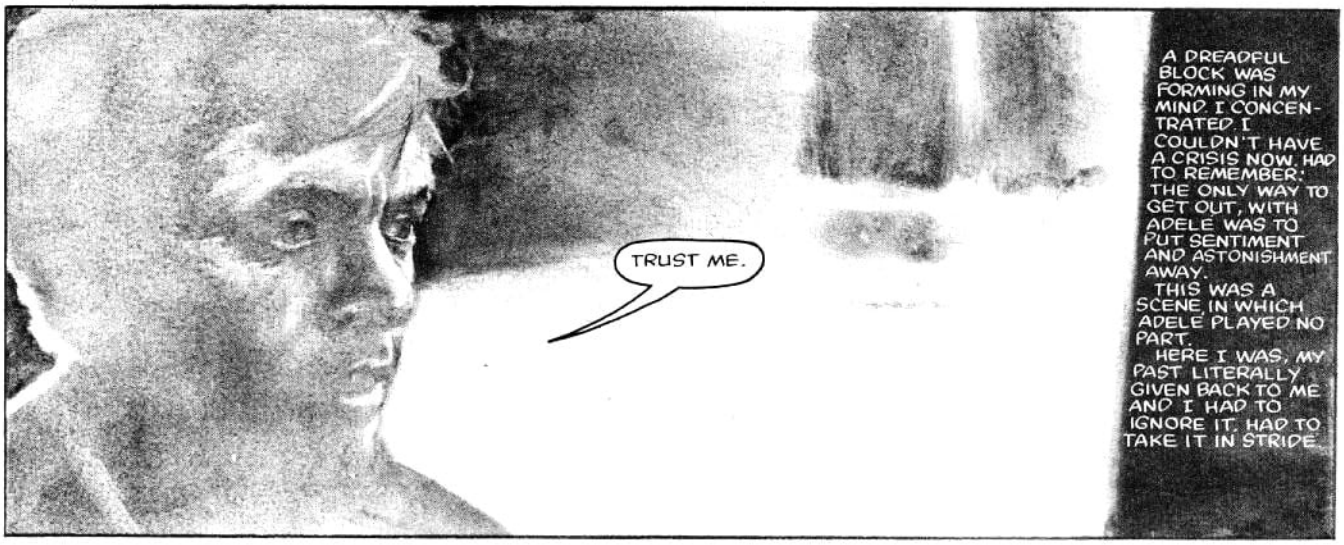
INTELLIGENCE HAD IT THAT THIS SIDE OF THE WALL DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT US. WHAT I DIDN'T KNOW AS I WAS CLIMBING INTO THE BELLY OF THE TOWER WAS THAT INTELLIGENCE WAS WRONG. DEAD WRONG.

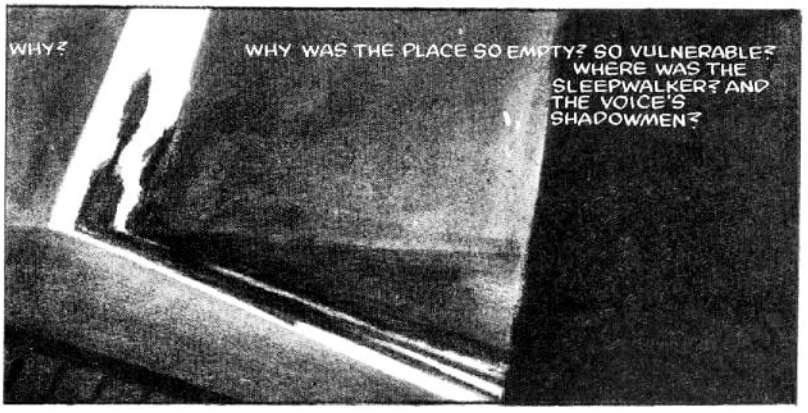
HE IS COMING?
I AM CERTAIN OF IT, SIR.

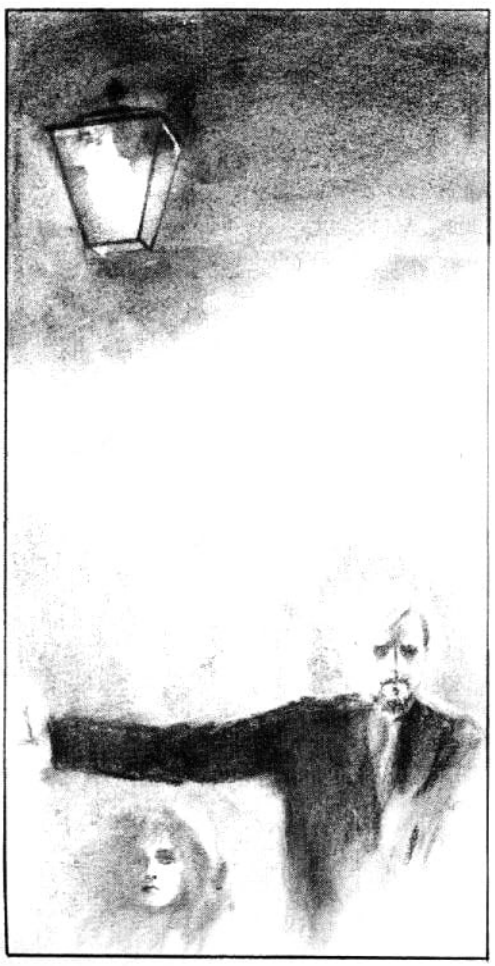


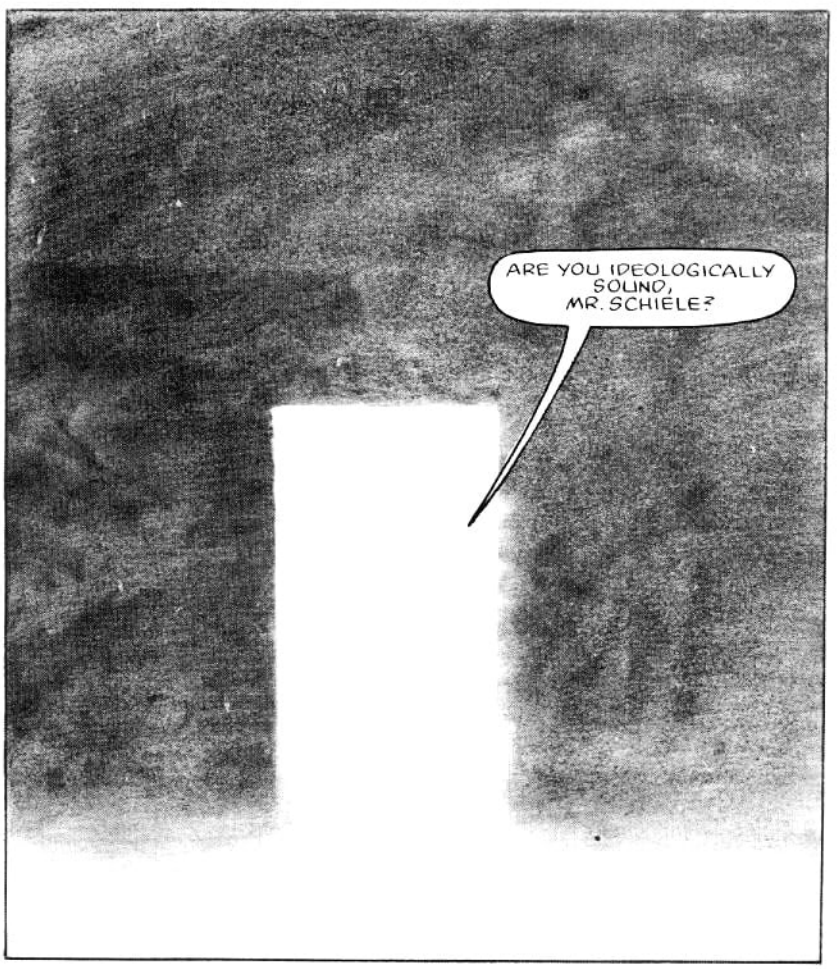
I'LL... ATTEND TO IT.

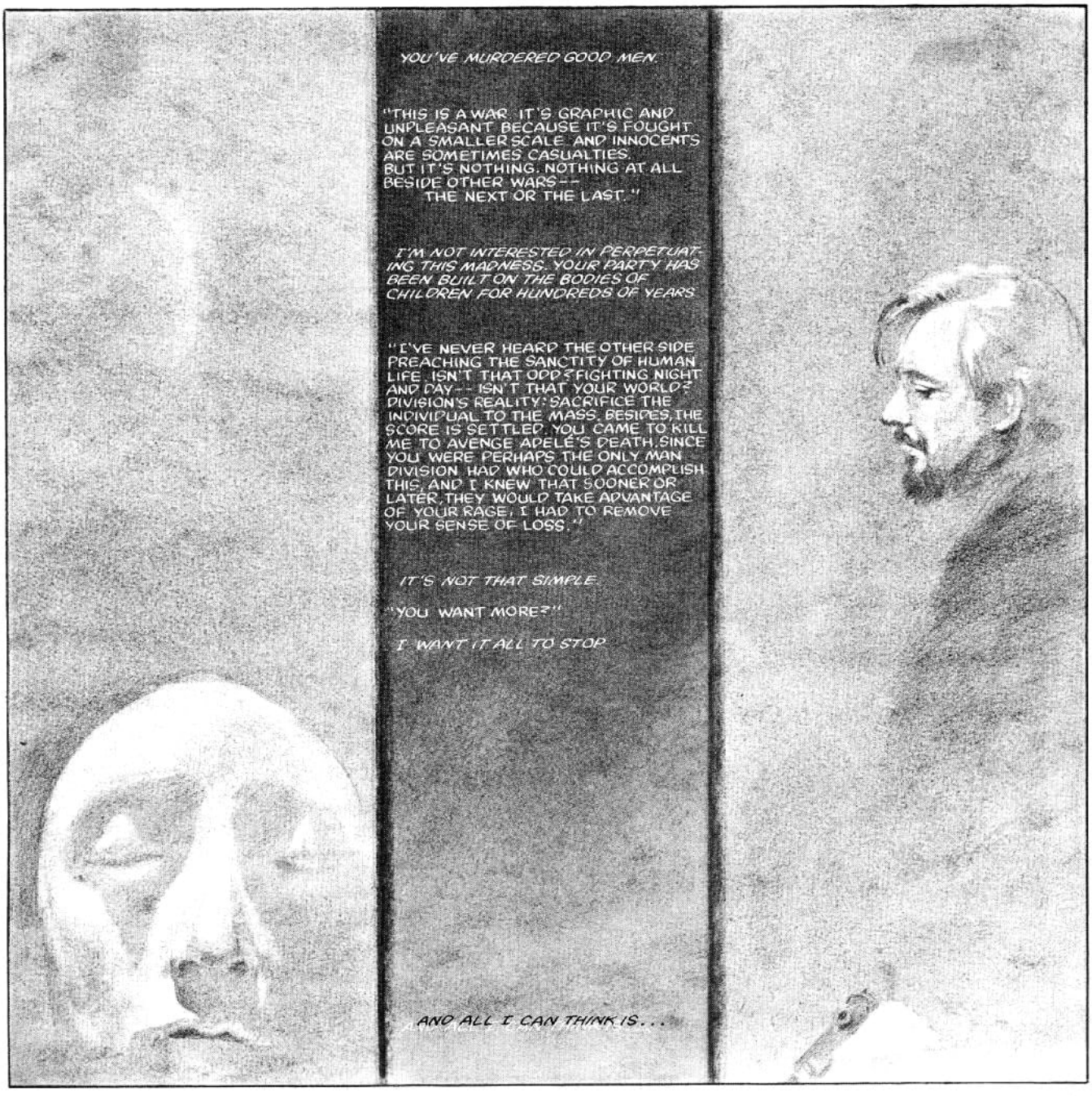

FIFTEEN YEARS EARLIER, IN A SMALL PARK, DURING A PERFORMANCE OF THE SOE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION. A BOMB, SET BY TERRORISTS FROM THIS SIDE OF THE WALL, WAS DETONATED, KILLING ELEVEN PEOPLE.
MY WIFE'S NAME HAD BEEN ADELÉ. SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN TWENTY FOUR THE FOLLOWING WEEK.
I APPROACHED THE OTHER FIGURE IN THE ROOM. MY WORLD STOPPED AS OUR EYES MET.
WHAT HAPPENED NEXT WAS A SECOND CHANCE. AND IT TOOK MY BEATING HEART OUT OF MY CHEST AND LAID IT, QUIVERING BEFORE ME.
HERE SHE WAS. ALMOST TWENTY FOUR, WITH THE SAME WHITE ROSE PETALS I HAD PLACED IN HER HAIR, THE NIGHT OF THE CONCERT! HERE WAS ADELÉ! SHE HELD ME, AND TEARS FILLED HER EYES AS SHE WHISPERED MY NAME. *EVERYTHING* I KNEW WAS *SHATTERED*.

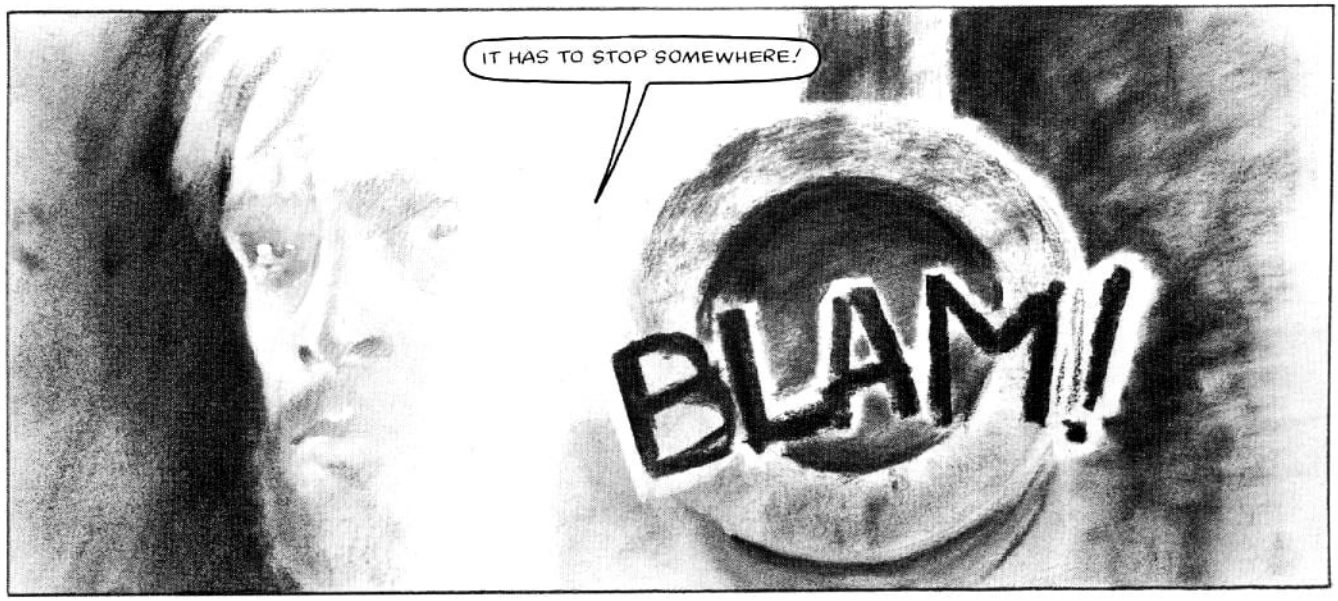

TRUST ME.
A DREADFUL BLOCK WAS FORMING IN MY MIND. I CONCENTRATED. I COULDN'T HAVE A CRISIS NOW. HAD TO REMEMBER: THE ONLY WAY TO GET OUT, WITH ADELE, WAS TO PUT SENTIMENT AND ASTONISHMENT AWAY.
THIS WAS A SCENE IN WHICH ADELE PLAYED NO PART.
HERE I WAS, MY PAST LITERALLY GIVEN BACK TO ME AND I HAD TO IGNORE IT, HAD TO TAKE IT IN STRIDE.


WHY?
WHY WAS THE PLACE SO EMPTY? SO VULNERABLE? WHERE WAS THE SLEEPWALKER? AND THE VOICE'S SHADOWMEN?



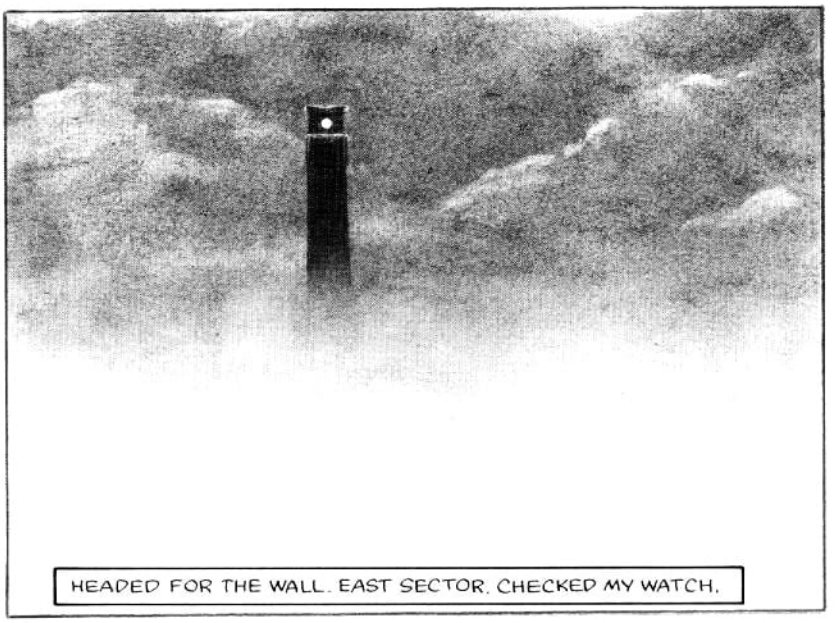

ARE YOU IDEOLOGICALLY SOUND, MR. SCHIELE?


YOU'VE MURDERED GOOD MEN.
"THIS IS A WAR. IT'S GRAPHIC AND UNPLEASANT BECAUSE IT'S FOUGHT ON A SMALLER SCALE. AND INNOCENTS ARE SOMETIMES CASUALTIES. BUT IT'S NOTHING. NOTHING AT ALL BESIDE OTHER WARS-- THE NEXT OR THE LAST."
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN PERPETUATING THIS MADNESS. YOUR PARTY HAS BEEN BUILT ON THE BODIES OF CHILDREN FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS.
"I'VE NEVER HEARD THE OTHER SIDE PREACHING THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE. ISN'T THAT ODD? FIGHTING NIGHT AND DAY -- ISN'T THAT YOUR WORLD? DIVISION'S REALITY: SACRIFICE THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE MASS. BESIDES, THE SCORE IS SETTLED. YOU CAME TO KILL ME TO AVENGE ADELE'S DEATH, SINCE YOU WERE PERHAPS THE ONLY MAN DIVISION HAD WHO COULD ACCOMPLISH THIS, AND I KNEW THAT SOONER OR LATER, THEY WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR RAGE. I HAD TO REMOVE YOUR SENSE OF LOSS."
IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.
"YOU WANT MORE?"
I WANT IT ALL TO STOP.
AND ALL I CAN THINK IS...

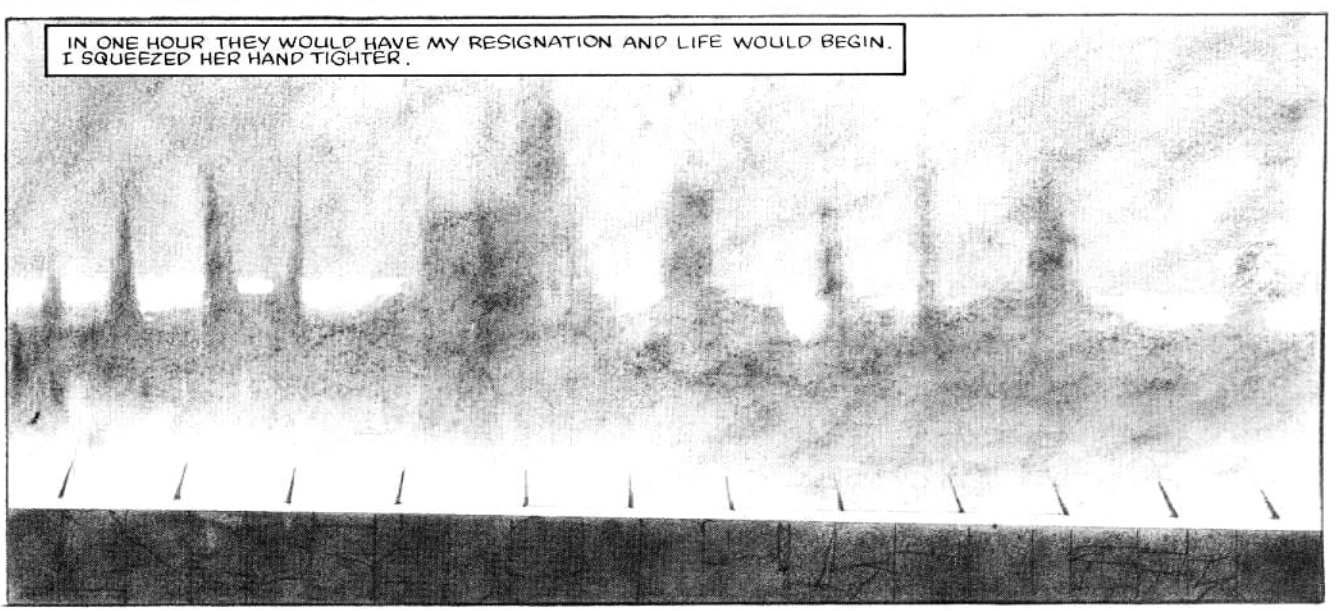

IT HAS TO STOP SOMEWHERE!
BLAM!!

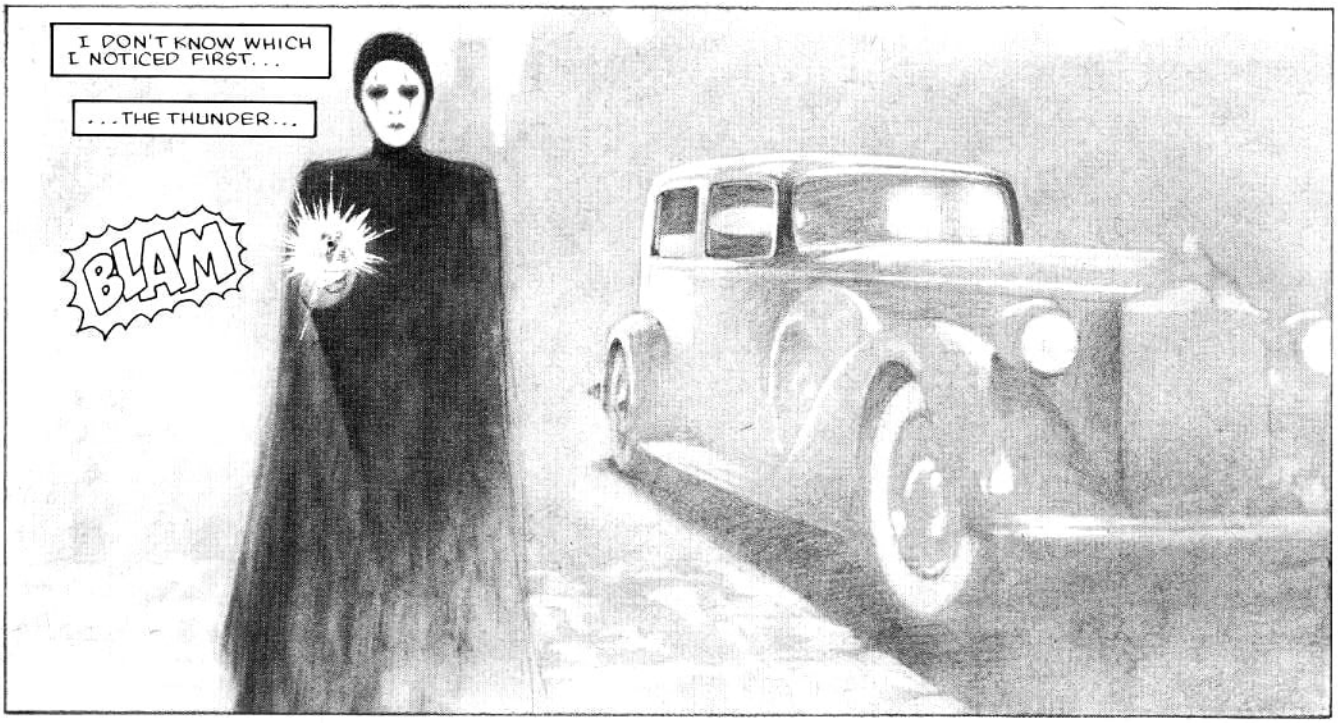
I TURNED AWAY.
I DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW IF SHE WAS CRYING.
THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD SAY THAT WOULD CHANGE WHAT SHE HAD JUST SEEN.
THIS WAS A WAR.
A WAR WITHOUT MORAL LIMIT. A WAR TOO MUCH LIKE THE LAST. TOO MUCH LIKE THE ONE I HAD LOST HER IN BEFORE.
I PRAYED I HADN'T JUST LOST HER AGAIN, IN A SUBTLER WAY.

I TOOK ADELE'S HAND IN MINE AND WE RAN.


HEADED FOR THE WALL. EAST SECTOR. CHECKED MY WATCH.

IN TWENTY-THREE MINUTES, DIVISION WOULD BE WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE.
IN TWENTY-FOUR MINUTES, THEY WOULD ARRANGE ESCAPE.


IN ONE HOUR THEY WOULD HAVE MY RESIGNATION AND LIFE WOULD BEGIN. I SQUEEZED HER HAND TIGHTER.


I DON'T KNOW WHICH I NOTICED FIRST...
...THE THUNDER...
BLAM

...OR THE LIGHTNING.

AS I FELL, I REALIZED. WHY WAS THE TOWER UNGUARDED? WHY WAS GANZ DEAD? WHY WAS I TOLD TO TAKE OUT MR. X?

ADELE PICKED UP THE GUN.

BLAM!

THE SLEEPWALKER IS--WAS-- DIVISION'S MAN. I WAS WITNESSING THE TWISTED IRONIC END TO A TWISTED IRONIC OPERATION TO PUT THE SLEEPWALKER IN POWER. THE OTHER SIDE WANTED THE VOICE GONE. SILENCED. SO THEY SET HIM UP. BOUGHT HIS NEXT IN COMMAND.

DIVISION KNEW. DIVISION SET IT UP. THEY KNEW GANZ'S WEAPON WOULDN'T DO IT. THEY LIED TO HIM. THAT'S WHY THE POOR BASTARD GOT HIMSELF KILLED. HE HAD FIGURED IT OUT. HE HAD FOUND ADELE AND WAS ATTEMPTING TO TAKE HER BACK WITH HIM. SHE WAS HIS *PROOF!*

PROOF THAT THEY KNEW OUR EVERY MOVE.

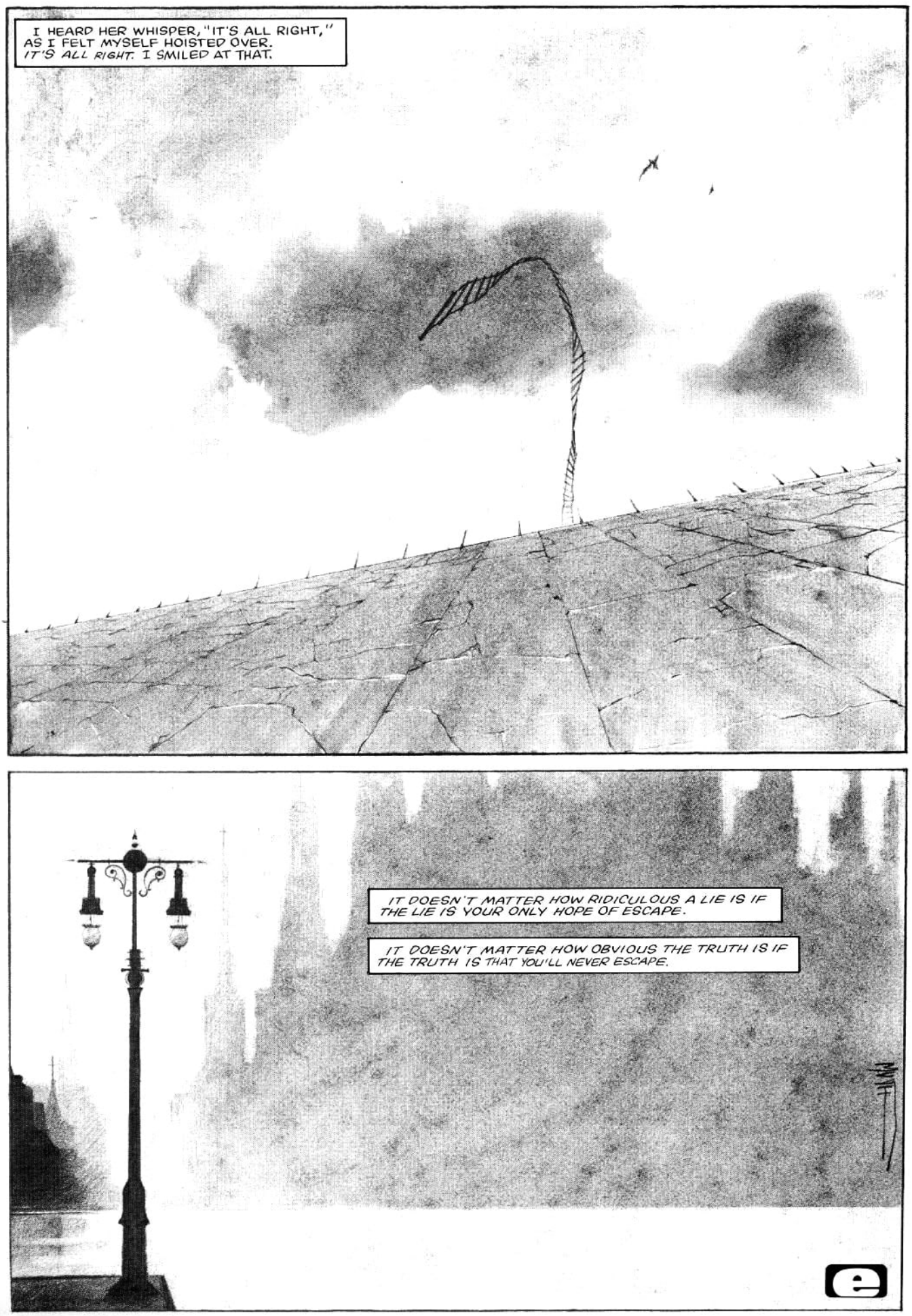
DIVISION DIDN'T WANT THE VOICE OUT OF THE WAY SO THEY COULD BEGIN TO INVADE THIS SIDE OF THE WALL, AS GANZ, X AND I WERE TOLD. THEY WANTED IT ALL TO STAY THE SAME. WITH NO MORE WARS...

... THEY GO OUT OF BUSINESS.

AND THE VOICE INTENDED TO KEEP COMMUNICATIONS ZERO, MAYBE HOPING THIS FIGHTING WOULD FINALLY COME TO AN END. WHO WOULD CONTINUE THE TRADITION? SOMEONE TO TAKE THIS WAR OUT OF THE CLOAK AND DAGGER MODE. THEY KNEW IT WAS NO GOOD JUST ELIMINATING THE VOICE. THEY HAD TO ELIMINATE THE VOICE ***AND*** ESCALATE THE FIGHTING.

SO THEY INTENDED TO OUTRAGE THE PEOPLE OF THIS SIDE BY KILLING OFF THEIR LEADER. AND EXCITE THE ANGER ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL BY LOSING ITS TOP-THREE-OPERATIVES. HOW FAR COULD THE MISSILE LAUNCHING BE?

NOW... THAT WASN'T GOING TO HAPPEN. NOW GOD KNOWS WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.


I HEARD HER WHISPER, "IT'S ALL RIGHT," AS I FELT MYSELF HOISTED OVER. IT'S ALL RIGHT. I SMILED AT THAT.
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW RIDICULOUS A LIE IS IF THE LIE IS YOUR ONLY HOPE OF ESCAPE.
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW OBVIOUS THE TRUTH IS IF THE TRUTH IS THAT YOU'LL NEVER ESCAPE.